TO-MORROW MORNING

by

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"I'VE KISSED YOUR MOTHER EVER SINCE WE WERE KIDDIES!"

TO-MORROW MORNING

A Chronicle of the New Eve
And the Same Old Adam

BY

EDITH BARNARD DELANO

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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From drawings by John Alonzo Williams

TO-MORROW MORNING

I

No matter how full the day, how pressing the moment, Martha Ramsay never came into her dining-room without a little glow of pleasure. It was the prettiest room in her pretty house, with that combined charm, apparently so difficult of achievement, of restfulness at night and of brightness in the morning. To-day she paused an instant in the hall, fastening the link of her cuff, smiling with thankfulness at the absorbed little group at the breakfast table. The sunlight shone through the bay-window across the table, with its centerpiece of bright cosmos in an old blue bowl, its shining silver and linen. Robert, as usual, was ensconced behind the widespread pages of the "Times," and three dutifully quiet children were preoccupied with their bowls of porridge. As Martha looked, Cecily, her younger daughter, reached a small,

surreptitious hand toward the sugar-bowl, ignoring Ruth's reproachful eyes.

"Good-morning, all my loves!" said Martha, smiling at them and sinking into her place back of the silex.

"Mother," said Ruth, "how old do you have to be before you can stop eating oatmeal for breakfast if you want to?"

"You may stop now," said Martha, "if you have had enough! Cecily, you know very well that you will have a horrible pain if you put four spoonfuls of sugar in your cocoa. Bobs"—she bent over the curly head of her youngest—"oh, Bobs, my lovey-lamb! Why did n't you come in to see Mummy this morning? What have you got for me?"

"There are n't any made!" said Bobs, dodging her passionate kisses and apparently trying to swallow the bowl of his spoon.

"He did n't go in to see you because he made Hedwig put on his white suit, that 's why," said Cecily.

Sometimes Martha was inclined to suspect that her second daughter lacked sympathy, and, except that Cecily was always surprising

her, would also have suspected that the child possessed but little imagination; for Cecily was given to a most trying downrightness at times. But, remembering this, Martha left her first thought unspoken, and sank into her place back of the coffee things with a casually reproving—

"You might have asked Hedwig to remind *you* not to tattle, Cecily!" Then she spoke to the back sheet of the newspaper. "Bert, your family is assembled!"

The paper was tossed across the room, and two twinkling eyes met Martha's.

"Tyrant!" said Mr. Ramsay.

It was his habitual morning greeting; the children believed it one of those curious terms of endearment that parents are given to. Martha blew him a kiss, and proceeded to the business of the coffee-making, while Robert approvingly observed her trig tailored blouse and the little close hat.

"All ready to walk downtown with me, I see," said he. "Good girl!"

His Martha smiled at him. "I think it's rather clever of me, really, stealing that extra half-hour of my husband's company!"

"You are a wonder, Pats," said he. That was another one of his phrases, it having lost nothing in earnestness during all the years he had used it. "What's on to-day?"

"Hospital board in the morning — and I shall probably have to spend an hour or two with the new housekeeper afterward; she's upsetting things and the nurses don't like her. Home to luncheon with the kiddies, a meeting at the club this afternoon, and I shall have to speak about the penny school-lunch scheme. And oh, Bert —"

She set down her coffee-cup, leaned back, and looked across the table with an expression of mingled dismay and appeal, which Robert met with his smile of proud indulgence.

"Well," said he, "that seems a rather full day! You know you *are* a wonder, Pats!"

"But oh, Bert, that child is coming to-day!" The look on her face added to itself a third quality — helplessness.

"Is it a boy coming to play wif me? I *am* so tired of just girls!" This from Bobs, plaintively.

"Mother's lamb! No, it is not a boy, but a nice big, big girl!"

"Oh, Genevieve's girl!" said Robert senior, with a marked absence of enthusiasm. "Good lord, Pats, I thought you 'd get out of that somehow!"

"I don't call that a girl," Cecily observed, at large. "You told us the other day that Vieva 's twenty. I don't call twenty a girl, Mother!"

"It 's a girl until it 's married, silly," said Ruth. Apparently neither parent heard these interpolations.

"I had no intention of getting out of it, Bert," Martha was saying. "And how could I, after the letter Genevieve wrote? Really, you know, it was one of the most touching things I ever read. Why, when you were children, Genevieve was almost as much your sister as Helen or Essie; and now for twenty-two years she's been living anywhere, as you might say, — a minister's wife, — a poor minister's wife, what's more."

"They all are," said Robert.

But Martha went on, unheeding, warming to her subject.

"Genevieve has done her best for Vieva so

far. Somehow she managed to send her to boarding-school — and *how* she managed it on his salary I do *not* see —"

"Genevieve had her share of Aunt Pussy's money," Bert threw in.

"So she did — I had forgotten. But even so, Bert, — think what a life she's led, going every year or two from one little country parish to another, away from all of her own kind —"

"Well, she married him!"

"Oh, *yes*, darling, she *married* him! But what does a girl know, a girl brought up in the household of well-to-do relatives, as Genevieve was in your mother's house? And now here's her own girl! And she writes that this year they are in the poorest and most lonely parish they have ever had, away up in the mountains — and South Carolina mountains *can* be pretty well out of the world, you know! And to make it even worse, they have Mr. Spaulding's mother with them, and she 's paralyzed — oh, the situation is just plainly impossible! How should *I* feel, do you think, if Ruth or Cecily were coming home, after five years of boarding-school, to such a household as that? No, it is perfectly

reasonable for Genevieve to want her girl to have some young life, something of a girl's good time, the sort of good time she had in your mother's house, Bert!"

"Much good *she* made of it!"

"That has nothing to do with it! Genevieve thinks — and I quite agree with her — that a child has a right to as good a time as its parents had, and as good an education and as good a chance. Yes, and more than that! What do we give life for, what do we carry it on for, except that each new generation may have a better opportunity than we have had?"

"And the only way Genevieve can do that is to foist her girl on us, is it?" Bert, as he asked this, looked like his sister Helen; and when his sister Helen wore that expression people said she glared.

"Well, what if it is?" his wife returned. "I am only too glad to do what I can for Genevieve's daughter; and surely, Bert, you would not have your wife do less than your mother did?"

This was unanswerable, but Mr. Ramsay's expression was very much that of the spoiled

child which is having an unwelcome medicine forced upon it. "Well, that's all right! I don't deny a word of it," he asserted. "But what on earth are you going to do with a young thing of twenty? You don't suppose you can send her out in the Park with Bobs and Hedwig, do you? Nor to dancing-school with the girls? What are you going to *do* with her?"

"You need not talk as though I were entirely responsible for her. She's your cousin, after all, dear — isn't she?" asked Martha sweetly. And then she remarked to her eldest daughter, "If you have finished, Ruth, you may be excused."

"But I have n't, mother!" said Ruth, protesting. "I'm waiting for daddy to ask me to have some more bacon. I did n't want to interrupt!"

Ordinarily Martha's little ruse would have ended his power of objection; but not to-day — perhaps because Robert had anew an undefined consciousness which had caused him a certain uneasiness more than once before, that Martha was apt to be more polite, "nicer," to his family than he was himself.

"Oh, she's my cousin, yes," he said. "But

she's Helen's and Essie's, too. Why could n't Genevieve write appealing letters about her girl to Helen or Essie? Why could n't they be the ones to give the child a good time, instead of us?"

"Essie's almost an invalid. Nobody ever expects Essie to do anything, you know. And Helen — oh, well, Helen — she would n't ask Helen, of course! But that has nothing to do with it, really, Bert, dear! It's our affair."

"But I don't see why it should be, Pats. Genevieve is my cousin, but the girl is also the daughter of a man whom none of the family likes. He wears spectacles and blurs his esses. He probably is wrong — or queer — it is the same thing! We don't like him, that's all; none of us likes him. Genevieve knew that when she married him. Probably his child takes after him. Genevieve used to be a winner for looks, but there's no such luck as the girl taking after her. Bound to take after the father. Daughters always do inherit the unpleasant traits of their fathers. The Reverend Mr. Spaulding is just the sort of man to pass on —"

"Aunt Helen says I've got my father's

nose," Cecily remarked dreamily, fingering the member in question, looking off into space.

Martha bit her lip. Bert's face suddenly flushed, and he looked at his younger daughter rather with the air of not having seen her before. Ruth giggled; her sense of humor was precocious. Martha bent toward Cecily.

"Cecily, don't you think you had better start for school rather early to-day, because you have to carry the goldfish?" she suggested.

"Oh, yes, mother! And I do so hope nobody else will bring one with three tails! I do want mine to be the nicest!"

Cecily had slipped from her chair, and was vigorously rubbing her face with her napkin. Her father was looking at her with stern disapproval.

"Cecily, use your napkin at the table only," he commanded; then, his dignity once more reinstated, "Martha," said he, "do you permit that child to express such a sentiment, unrebuked? Why should Cecily want to have a better fish than any one else? And what is she taking a fish to school for, anyway? I never heard of fish in school!"

Oh, these children of hers! Martha's eyes were dancing with fun, but she managed to reply with seriousness.

"They are fitting up an aquarium at school," she explained, answering the least difficult question first. She submitted herself to the kisses of her daughters, nodded a summons toward the dim form of Hedwig lingering in the hallway, put an arm out toward Bobs, as much to draw him from his chair as to embrace him.

"There! Run along now, all of you! No, go up with Hedwig, Bobs, my lovey-lamb!" Then, when the three had disappeared, she smiled at Robert, who grinned back rather reluctantly.

"Cecily is only truthful," she said. "She expresses her feelings a little too openly, perhaps; but of course she *does* hope her goldfish will be the prettiest one!" Then, the spirit of mischief overcoming her, "You are uncommonly truthful yourself, Bert!" she added. "And as you observed, daughters are apt —"

Robert laughed, pushed back his chair and came around to bend over and drop a kiss behind her ear. "Well," he said, "what about

Genevieve's girl? I suppose we've got to make the best of it!"

Martha tucked her arm through his and went with him into the hall. "You dear!" she said, looking up at him with a smile which persisted in being tremulous at such moments, notwithstanding all the years of his being dear and of her telling him so.

Presently, certain small ceremonies having been duly observed, she brushed her cheek against his coat, and sighed. His arm embraced her more closely, and she could feel him laugh a little.

"Well! Out with it!" said he.

"I was just wondering how, *how* I can get to the station at four o'clock. I do not see! I was wondering — do you think — but I don't suppose you can — I know you have a busy day, too. It *is* going to be *awfully* busy, is n't it?"

He groaned. "Now, look here, Pats, you are n't trying to coax me to go to the station to meet that girl, are you? Because —"

"Oh, no, I knew you'd be too busy — I —"

"Busy be hanged! I plain don't want to!"

"WELL," HE SAID, "WHAT ABOUT GENEVIEVE'S GIRL?"

Again her cheek was brushing his coat. "Of course you don't, old dear! I don't blame you a bit! I — I'll manage somehow."

"Oh, I'll go! Of course, I'll go. And when you're ready to ship her off home again, I'll take her back to the station. But that's all I am going to do, Pats! It's no use your counting on me, or trying to get around me! I don't see why she had to be wished on us, anyway! I tell you, I never did like that man Genevieve married; and why can't you pass the girl along to Helen after she's been here a day or two? Helen's got fourteen servants and nary a child, and —"

He stopped, because Martha was looking up at him as though his words were Heaven-sent words of wisdom, because he was conscious of the dear pressure of her arm in his, because —

"I knew you'd help me out," she said. "You are such an old darling, Bert!"

It was not until the middle of the morning that from some obscure depth of his subconsciousness the thought came to him, quite spoiling the rest of his day, "How in thunder am I to know Genevieve's girl from any other?"

II

When, some half-dozen years before the day on which their Cousin Genevieve's daughter was to arrive, the Robert Livingston Ramsays had found themselves for the first time installed in the house which they had designed and watched throughout its growth and furnished, it had seemed to them that they had created, or caused to be created, something more than a charming, a satisfactory abode, something more than a proper house in which to live and to bring up their children. To Robert, perhaps, it could seem nothing more desirable than a very nice house which Martha liked; but to Martha it was more than all of that — enormously more, with infinite possibilities. It had seemed to her that for years and years — although she knew well enough that their actual number could have been but six — she had pored over magazine pages devoted to the lure of decorating, lingered wistfully inside and out of the shops where beautiful things were sold, and

longed — not so secretly, either! — to be able to evolve a house, particularly the interior of a house, which should at once express herself, her own tastes and affections, and at the same time be some patently admirable thing, something possibly even to be exploited in the pages of those same magazines, something which should stand before the community as a satisfaction, an example, possibly even as an inspiration — and certainly, for themselves, all of that and more.

Such was Martha's dream; but for years and years — although their actual number was but six! — the dream had been merely one of those unattainable, cherished playthings of the imagination which mean so much to women of Martha's type — the alert, executive type which rises swiftly to prominence whenever the door of opportunity is opened the least little bit in the world. But for all her dreams, Martha was not given to waiting for them to come true. The business of life held her; she loved it, enjoyed it to the full, took hold of it with a will, lived it day by day with all the more enjoyment because she could hopefully put into the future

whatever was unattainable in the present. And, indeed, the happy present held enough. She had been quite sure that it would, when she had dared to marry Robert on the little-a-year that he had to offer her; they had both remained serene and unafraid before the mingled surprise and disapproval of their families. It really did not vitally concern Bert's sister, for instance, — so they told themselves, and so Bert told Helen, — if their annual house rent was considerably less than the salary of Helen's butler; and Martha's grandmother had not made her orphaned state one of such unqualified ease and luxury that she should find it impossible to forsake the round of social ceremonial with which the elder lady's days were filled. Martha had had enough of that, in the three years since she left college; and the two people most concerned in their marriage agreed that if Bert gave up his clubs in town and the most expensive country club, and belonged only to a neighborhood tennis club; if they used the interest of Martha's small patrimony for their common benefit; and if they forsook most of the expensive habits and occupations to which

they had been accustomed, they should get along very well, indeed.

The supposition had worked out admirably. They *had* got along very well, indeed. For a time after Ruth's birth Martha was languid and Bert wore an anxious look toward the end of the month; but by the time Cecily arrived Martha was herself again and there was a cheerful consciousness on Bert's part that the first of the month could hold no uneasiness for him. In other ways, too, they had adjusted themselves to the existence in the smaller town where they had taken up their abode, since Robert's business opportunity lay there. During the three years when she had lived with her grandmother, Martha had tried out all of the social activities of the larger city. They had been welcome enough during the first year after the more circumspect life at college, obligatory during the second, and thoroughly wearying during the third. She was quite ready to go on to the other life with her Robert, and by no means willing to admit that it would be tiresome. She possessed to the full the wholesomeness of her type, which accepts and makes the most of

simpler pleasures and simpler ways of living than it may have been accustomed to; and after all, in the developing life of the day, there is promise enough in the future of all such young people as the Ramsays. They were prepared to like life in the small city which was to be the place of their abode, and they did like it. They looked forward to taking part in its activities, to making its interests their own; and in this, too, they found realization as pleasant and complete as they had foreseen. They lived in an intimate, small neighborhood where other young couples were as absorbed in the coming of babies and the purchase of a new chair or picture as they were themselves. Robert lived mostly in his busy and happy present, with occasional imaginative excursions into the future, urged by Martha or by his ambitions for Martha's pleasure; and she had always the dreams of that house of hers and of being able to "do things" — a vague realm of endeavor that she glimpsed, as yet, only through the activities of some of her old friends, college mates and others, whom she saw from time to time.

Then, quite suddenly, Martha's little door of opportunity had opened. Not that Martha knew it at the moment; for instead of bearing the least resemblance to a door, it looked wonderfully like her own Robert coming home from his usual five-forty-seven train; and the smile he wore was in no way different to Martha's affectionate if casual observation from the smile he wore when the Giants won or he had "nailed" an unusually large contract. Martha had been putting in sweet-peas, and had dropped down on the front steps for a daring moment, since the afternoon had been warm in spite of the early season. From there she watched her Robert's advance.

Their daughter Ruth, aged four, had met him at the corner, and was advancing at his side by means of a peculiar hop which could only be achieved when she had hold of a strong paternal hand; and little Cecily was toddling with uncertain steps and waving arms down the path toward her father and sister. Martha knew that the baby would sit down abruptly about halfway to the opening in the hedge; she did, and the smiling Robert, arriving just in time to

avert a howl, made the rest of the short journey with one daughter perched aloft on his shoulder, while the other proudly bore his bundle of magazines and evening papers.

He deposited Cecily in Martha's lap, and smiled down at her. It was not their custom to kiss under the observant eyes of passing neighbors; in spite of their six years of marriage kisses were still surprisingly sweet, and had not yet become mere commonplace adjuncts of marital politeness, used chiefly to punctuate arrivals and departures.

"Well, Pats, I've got it!" Robert had announced, on that far-away spring afternoon.

"Good!" Martha had dutifully rejoined. "What is *it?*"

How little had she foreseen his answer!

"Behold in me," said Robert, striking an attitude in front of her, "the treasurer and general manager of the Patagonian Smelting and Refining Company, Incorporated!"

Undoubtedly it had been one of their moments of thrill. Another had come five or six months later when they went together, arm in arm, from room to room of their new house; for

his new position would make it desirable that they should move back to his home city, the city where he had already so many friends and where his sister Helen lived. And almost immediately, in the far-sighted enthusiasm of their first big success, Robert had boldly suggested putting all of Martha's small patrimony into a house; so that this was alike the realization of Martha's dream and something her very own, most intimately and actually, bought with her money, which she had never quite been able to think of as hers, and furnished and outfitted according to her own ideas of the seemly and the beautiful.

And in the new house, it seemed to them, their life had begun anew. Actually, it was no new life at all, but the normal development of the one they had begun with their courageousness of six years before; but it seemed new. For one thing, Martha was delivered from household care — sweet enough, but absorbing, as she later came to admit that it had been. The friends whom she had before seen only in those brief intervals when some one else was looking after the babies, she now might see at any time

— and did. Their friends became hers, and soon she was sharing their occupations. The College Club welcomed her; then the Civic Club; she found herself discovering all sorts of enthusiasms and beliefs which she had not known that she possessed. Then it was really capital fun to be able to trot out to the Country Club for a dance, or to make one of a gay little crowd on the piazza or the links. Bert enjoyed it, and Martha warmed at the way the other men welcomed him. In the winter evenings, too, cards and dances and the occasional little dinners which constituted the more usual gayeties of their contemporaries seemed to the Ramsays as delectable now as though they had not so cheerfully forsaken such things when to forsake them had been the only way in which they could be together in the desirable state of matrimony.

Then, gradually, Martha had found herself more and more involved in daylight affairs of boards and committees and such, and less and less attracted by the cards and dances and what-not of the evenings. Bert became more and more willing to stay comfortably at home

after dinner; by gradations which they could not have traced, their hours at the Country Club came to be the afternoons of Saturdays and holidays in good weather, when Bert made a leisurely circuit of the links and Martha joined him late enough to come home with him.

The arrival of Robert Junior had rather served to set a seal of permanency upon this state of affairs, if such a seal had, indeed, been needed. By the time she was about again, Martha found herself at the fore in so many activities that sometimes weeks passed during which she gave no thought to that more conventional social life which she and her Robert found themselves content to ignore. Then, all abruptly and unwarrantably, as it seemed to Robert, the pleasant semi-monotony of their life was to be broken into by the coming of this young incubus in the person of his Cousin Genevieve's daughter — who was, also, the child of a man whom he disliked.

This was the thought which nagged Mr. Ramsay throughout his day — and most especially that part of it after he happened to remember that he had never seen the young per-

son whom he was to meet. He vainly tried to telephone Martha at the Civic Club, the hospital, at his own house at luncheon-time; four o'clock beckoned him toward the station, and he had not found her.

Rather belatedly Martha remembered that some such difficulty would be sure to present itself. In fact, with a long habit of relying upon a kindly and capable husband, she had altogether put out of her thought and care the young person and her arrival; her own day had brought unto itself sundry difficulties and complications, what with the unreasonableness of the new matron at the hospital and an unexpected meeting of a Suffrage Committee which had been, also, unexpectedly lively and long. Martha actually forgot Genevieve's girl until she found herself, at dusk, in her own hallway. Then she spoke in a whisper to the maid who had opened the door, —

"Has the young lady come, Nelly?" she asked. And the bright-faced maid nodded, smiled, and indicated the living-room that went across the back of the house, facing the garden and comfortably away from the street.

There Martha found them, her Robert and their young guest. Robert was on one side of the fireplace, the girl on the other, most domestically as to appearance, in the light of the fire in the quiet room; but Bert's voice, reaching Martha before she crossed the threshold, had in it something strained, almost a note of hoarseness — yet he was talking, talking . . .

Absurdly enough, there flashed through Martha's mind the memory of one of her visits to the Capitol with the Suffrage Committee, when a doughty opponent of the suffrage amendment had held the floor, and talked and talked, talked on and on and on, his weariness outclassed only by his dauntless determination, talked hoarsely, almost voiceless toward the end, until the last hour of the session struck and there was no longer time for an amendment to be —

Martha laughed, parted the curtains. Robert was leaning a little forward in his chair, talking, talking seriously, learnedly, doubtless admirably — on the intricacies of the income tax and the iniquities of the single-taxers. . . . He had his handkerchief in his hand — his brow

was damp; but his eyes did not waver from Vieva's face. He was doing his utmost to entertain her.

And the girl — rather small she was, and of a fragile prettiness in a blonde way, which remained pretty even after the long journey, and in spite of the rather wide-eyed look of wonder and the evident effort at responsiveness with which she met Robert's fixing gaze. She was sitting up very straight in her big chair, her small hands on its arms, her little feet together. Martha's first impression, which she recalled many times afterwards, was that Vieva, for all her smallness and her prettiness, was probably a capable little person with something of a will of her own; but there was really no time for much speculation.

Martha went briskly forward. The girl rose to her greeting, and Martha found her look very direct and altogether very nice, indeed; but at the same time she was quite aware that Bert, at her appearance, had stopped talking, had passed a hand upward over his damp forehead, throwing her a look most curiously mingled of reproach and thankfulness.

III

On the first evening Martha made the girl's fatigue after her long journey the excuse for an early bedtime. As a matter of fact, by the time dinner was over she felt that she was quite incapable either of further listening to Bert's painstaking efforts, of watching Vieva's little strained expression of attention and of vague surprise, or of trying somehow by her own efforts to bridge the two. By nine o'clock she was quite sure that she should become hysterical if she had to hear, once more, Vieva's soft little voice drawl, —

"Oh, *really*, Cousin Robert?"

Therefore she made the move toward the stairs, and on the way up she put her arm about the girl — perhaps from some emotion quite too vague to be analyzed. Certainly at the moment she was feeling ever so little sorry for Vieva; but then, she was feeling ever so little sorry for Robert and for herself as well.

However that may have been, she went with

the girl into the pretty guest-room, and noticed the plain little nightdress of ruffled muslin which Hedwig had laid out on the bed — noticed, too, the pair of crocheted bedroom slippers of crimson worsted, and recognized one of her sister-in-law Helen's inevitable Christmas presents. Genevieve had managed very well as to the girl's traveling clothes; the quaintness of these little night-things were subtly revealing, subtly touching, too.

She kissed the girl good-night with unexpected tenderness, and went into her own room. There she paused an instant, then sat down upon her couch and laughed, and laughed again, with the half-hysteria which she had been warding off, at the memory of Bert, Bert's voice, Bert's look, and — Bert's conversation — bless him! — as he had sat in the library trying to entertain Vieva. The income tax! And the look on Vieva's face! And Bert's crumpled handkerchief, and the look he threw at her as she came in! Oh, the darling that he was! And she laughed again.

She heard him coming up the stairs, and hastily stood up, for it would never do to have

him find her laughing. Also, it would be as well to forestall his remarks.

"Is n't she pretty, Bert?" she asked. "Don't you think she looks like her mother?"

"Are n't you coming downstairs again?" was her Robert's only response. "I've had an awful day, Pats. Come down and cheer a fellow up, can't you?" And the warmth of Martha's embrace was so comforting that he did not in the least try to analyze it!

At the breakfast table the next morning Cecily stared at her pretty cousin, and presently spoke.

"Cousin Vieva," she asked, "where are your spectacles?"

The big girl smiled at the little girl. Really, thought Martha, Vieva's smile promised a great deal; it held humor, charm, and infinite friendliness. She was quite prepared to like Vieva very much. If only Bert could be made to endure her presence in the house!

"My spectacles, Cecily?"

"Yes. Daddy said you wore them because you took after your father."

Martha scarcely heard the girl's laughing

rejoinder; she could only see Bert's look upon her, in the expression which said, "This is *your* child — what are you going to do about it?"

Then Bert said, sternly, "Cecily, have you finished your breakfast? Then eat it — and remember that children should be seen and not heard."

Martha bit her lip; oh, these children of hers! Where on earth had Bert resurrected that antique phrase? And how, how could he think of applying it to the modern child, the child whose least question was listened to and answered as punctiliously as though the fate of nations were involved!

Cecily seemed as surprised as her mother was. She was looking at her father with her most argumentative expression.

"But I have to be heard when I ask a question, daddy!" she explained. "And of course you can't help seeing me when I'm right here at the table!"

Vieva looked surprised; in fact, she turned a gaze that was quite startled from Cecily to Robert, and from Robert to Martha; evidently the conversation of the modern child was new

to Vieva. Then, with presence of mind which Martha found as promising as her smile, she said:—

"I do take after my father, Cecily. And you 're a good deal like yours, are n't you? Is n't it lovely to be like one's father?"

"Aunt Helen says I've got my father's no—" Cecily was beginning, holding her head back and crossing her eyes in an effort to look at her father's nose which was also hers.

Martha hastily interrupted.

"You may be like your father, too, Vieva, but you are certainly like your mother as well. And — I love your mother very much."

Vieva flushed, and looked at Martha with a soft delight; Martha, however, was still more aware of Bert's expression than of anything else. Perhaps it was to hide his embarrassment that he now arose, thrusting his folded paper into the side pocket of his coat.

"Well," he said to Martha, "are you going to walk down with me to-day? I'm rather in a hurry."

Martha smiled up at him. "Not to-day," she said; "I am going to get acquainted with Vieva

to-day — I shall have to go down to headquarters later to sign some letters, but except for that I am going to play. I may take Vieva to see Helen and Essie."

Her Robert raised his eyebrows. "Oh, very well," said he, and went out of the room wearing the expression of a martyr.

Martha laughed. "I am afraid I rather spoil my family," she said. The children had trooped out after their father. "And your Cousin Robert is the biggest baby of them all! But one likes to spoil nice men, does n't one?" she added.

Vieva smiled; Martha liked the way she caught her lip with her little white teeth. "I don't believe I know very much about men," she said. "But I think Cousin Robert is very — learned!"

Martha gasped a little, looked at her plate. "Oh, my dear, he does n't always talk about taxes and things," she said. "He was just a little afraid of you, last night!"

"Afraid of *me*, Cousin Martha! Oh!"

Vieva looked at her in her wide-eyed way, a look which gave her a singular appearance of innocence, the innocence of a startled woods-

creature, perhaps; the day was to come when Martha would suspect that look to be almost too effective to be genuine, but to-day she found it appealing.

"Did n't you think a man could be afraid of you, Vieva?" she pursued, and liked the way the girl's smile flashed out.

"Oh, well, *young* ones," Vieva admitted, dimpling and flushing. "And — oh, Cousin Martha, I think I ought to tell you! There was one on the train yesterday —"

"My *dear!*" Martha began on a protesting note of horror.

"Oh, truly, Cousin Martha, it was n't as bad as it sounds! I really *do* know that much! Mamma is awfully strict; not a bit like the other girls' mothers I know; and at school, in Stanton, we were n't allowed to so much as know that a man existed! Truly, Cousin Martha!"

"Well? What was it, then?"

Again Vieva dimpled. "Oh, nothing, truly — only my suitcase was in the way, and he stumbled over it, and said, 'Excuse me,' and then I stooped down to fix it, and he did, too, and we — we bumped — and — and then —"

"Then?"

"Then I looked out of the window."

"What — all the way?"

"Oh, it was n't so very far! He got on at that place with all the chimneys. But — but whenever I happened to look around, he — he was n't looking out of *his* window, Cousin Martha, and — and —"

"*And*, Vieva?"

"Oh, nothing, Cousin Martha, except that when I got off he got off, too, and he bowed to Cousin Robert, and — and I thought it was so remarkable that he should know Cousin Robert, and — and that's all!"

Martha laughed, and arose. "Well, Vieva," she said, "I rather suspect that we shall not have very much difficulty in getting partners for you at the dances!" Then she remembered the probable prejudices of the Reverend Mr. Spaulding, and asked, "But do you dance, Vieva?"

"We were taught the waltz and the two-step at school —"

"Good gracious!" Martha interrupted.

But Vieva went on.

"And æsthetic dancing in the Gym. And some of the girls, when they came back from vacations, knew all the lovely new dances, and we used to try them when nobody was looking. I — I think, perhaps, I won't have much difficulty, Cousin Martha! Although," she added primly, "I am more used to guiding, naturally, than to dancing the girl's part!"

"Vieva," said Martha, "I don't wonder your mother wanted you to come visiting. You would surely have been wasted in that small Carolina village, and you the minister's daughter!"

Over that same thought she was smiling when, later in the morning, she was walking briskly down the hill toward the center of the town. Vieva promised well! After all, Genevieve had not lived out of their world so long as to be ignorant of its values! Vieva's place could not, by any possible chance, be a quiet parsonage fireside at a country cross-roads! Odd enough it was that she had come from such. The good reverend gentleman who was her father would never have been inspired to send her away; Genevieve, in spite of her youthful indiscretion

in marrying him and forsaking the ways and paths of her own people for his sake, must nevertheless have retained much of the tradition of what she had left behind her; Martha — who, after all, had married into the family and could only surmise at much of its inherited character — wondered whether Genevieve might not have just a little of the stuff of Helen in her. Then, with a laugh, she wondered whether the girl Vieva might not also be ever so little like her sister-in-law, that same Helen! The idea was grotesque enough, and she was so lost in it that she did, indeed, laugh aloud; at the moment a woman's voice spoke at her side.

"Martha Ramsay, are you telling yourself fairy-tales, that you should walk along State Street *laughing?*"

Martha turned her head, and laughed again.

"'Morning, Nance! It might have been a fairy-tale; but if it should be true —"

Then, as they walked briskly onward, Martha explained; for the friendship between herself and Mrs. Rodney Brookes was one of those sympathetic, lightly held relationships which are possible only to women of their type.

For of a type they were, albeit the difference in their ages was such that Ann Brookes's children were already sufficiently in the world to have occupations of their own — the occupation of the eldest, indeed, being twins, and of the youngest an enthusiasm for Suffrage which quite overshadowed her mother's interest in the cause. But that there was a difference in age neither woman was apt to remember; Ann's white head was held as alertly and her step was quite as brisk as Martha's own; and, moreover, their tastes were sufficiently alike to lead them along pretty much the same paths. To-day, for instance, both were bound for the hospital, where the new matron continued to give trouble; later in the day both would be found at Suffrage Headquarters, or perhaps on the same committee of the Civic Club; both were governors of the College Club; and if perchance their occupations did at times take divergent ways their friendship brought them back, and usually daily, to their pleasant ground of easy understanding.

"And Bert met her at the train?" Mrs. Brookes asked, when Martha stopped speak-

ing. "Ah, then my young man's mystery is not to remain a mystery forever! Though, if she is really like Helen, I —"

"Oh, but of course she's *not*, Nance! I told you, she is going to be rather a dear!"

"If she does n't turn out to be quite otherwise! Well, if that is Rodney's luck, he'll have to make the most of it! I've long ago made up my mind that I will not interfere — one does want to be an exceptional mother-in-law!"

"Goose!" said Martha, just touching her friend's arm. Then she added, "So it was Rodney, then?"

"It was," said Rodney's mother. "He wanted me to telephone you last night. He came into my room after I was in bed, even, to ask how on earth he could send her flowers when he did not know her name. He seemed rather reproachful about it, perhaps because I suggested that she might be a new cook or housemaid or something! He said I might trust something to his intuition, and that, anyway, cooks and housemaids did not travel on Pullmans; but I tried to make him understand that one can never tell, nowadays — and then he

said I was undemocratic, and then he did n't like it because I said I did n't follow him! Oh, my dear, you may be thankful that Bobby is still far away from that age! When your children begin to scorn you for being old-fogyish!"

Martha laughed again; all the world — their world, at least, and it was not so small! — knew that Mrs. Rodney Brookes was and would ever be in the forefront — a maker of opinion in their town as well as in the wider sphere reached by her club influence. So Martha laughed, and said, —

"One knows how Rodney scorns you!"

Rodney's mother smiled. "He has his sweethearting ways with me, I'll admit. I dare say I'm capable of jealousy, if it comes to a time when he'll be trying them on some one else. But it will have to come, sooner or later, and I suppose this girl of yours will not be any worse than another. I remember Genevieve — she was very lovely, and it seemed so amazing that she should marry as she did. But then, I had captured my own Rodney, and Rodney Junior had not yet come along."

"Heavens, Nance!" cried Martha, hugely

amused. "Are you trying to imply that poor Genevieve married her parson because neither of your Rodneys was available?"

Mrs. Brookes smiled back at her. "Well, perhaps I'm a little partial to my Rodneys! But — I do honestly think my boy is a charmer, and I know he is a flirtatious young rogue. How far do you suppose it went with those two children on the train yesterday?"

"Oh, it was merely a suitcase in the way, and Rod's trying to be polite, and their two silly young heads bumping together!"

"No more? Can you trust her that there was no more? For it would not be like Rodney to let it stop there! Unless" — she added thoughtfully — "unless he were really — what he calls being struck all of a heap!"

Martha smiled at the serious way she used one of Rodney's own phrases, but assured her, "There was no more, I am quite convinced. They simply bumped their heads, and then Vieva looked out of the window. She did seem to know that the view from Rodney's side of the car was not attractive enough to hold his attention; but except for that — she looked out

of the window! Genevieve seems to have done her duty, Nance; the girl's manners are all they should be, and she knew enough to tell me at once about the episode of the bump!"

Mrs. Brookes thought this over for a moment or two; then she said: "Well, I'll give a dance at the Country Club for her, and I'll get Grace to give her a luncheon, if she can spare an hour from her precious twins."

"Oh, you love!" cried Martha.

But Mrs. Brookes, as they mounted the steps of the hospital, waved Martha's thanks aside. "Nonsense," she said. "You will only have to mention that you have a girl staying with you to receive so many invitations that you'll be reminded of your débutante days! You'll have more than you will know what to do with, my dear; and as for Bert — oh, by the way, how does Bert take the invasion?"

Martha dimpled at the memory of the way Bert took it. "Awfully, poor lamb!"

Mrs. Brookes shook her head; she was enormously fond of Bert. "Of course he does — you 've spoiled him! I can only hope he does not realize what he's in for! Rodney's not easily

taken in; and if you could have heard him last night! It's my opinion, Martha, that Bert will find his comfortable domain taken up, a good deal of the time, with various young men, my Rodney among them. And" — she added, turning toward the small office on the left of the hall — "I think I'll just telephone the poor boy and tell him her name! He did so long to send flowers! He'll reproach me forever if I let him waste a whole day!"

Martha waited while Rodney's mother did her telephoning, and laughed when Ann rejoined her.

"You fraud — you and your jealousy!" she said.

But Mrs. Brookes returned,—

"Oh, well, I like him to think I'm his friend! I understand his feeling, too! Rodney's rather like me, and I never did like the grass to grow under my feet, as our old Bridget used to say."

And as to the truth of that, on young Rodney's part at least, Martha could testify before the day was out. She had expected to get home for luncheon, but had to telephone instead; after straightening out the new matron's diffi-

culties, an imperative message called her to the Civic Club, and there were three hours or more of work to be done at the insistence of a firm young secretary, so that it was tea-time when Martha got home. It might indeed have been much better, but that she was determined to get home before Bert, poor lamb!

For it was of Bert that she thought as she opened the door with her latch-key (which she always forgot to use when she was tired) and not in the least of young Brookes; but it was Rodney who arose from one of the big chairs in front of the fire as Martha went into the living-room, and Vieva from the other; while Ruth and Cecily, sitting cross-legged on the rug, had a big box of candy, opened, between them.

Rodney held toward her a cloak of his mother's, long familiar to them both. "Mrs. Ramsay," said he, with a friendly grin and quite shamelessly unabashed, "I found this cloak of yours in our hall this afternoon, and I thought you might want it, so I just brought it over. It *is* yours, is n't it? Oh — I asked Ruth and Cecily to introduce me to Miss Spaulding."

Martha returned his look as seriously as she

could. "And did I leave that box of candy in your hall, too, Rodney?" she asked.

It was her daughter Cecily who answered. "Rodney brought the candy to Ruth and me, mother!" she said. "We noticed it as he came up the walk, and he said he'd give it to us if we 'd interduce him to Cousin Vieva and stay in the room till you got back, and then he said not at all, it was cheap at the price. But Rodney must have got a bargain, mother, for it is n't cheap candy at all! And Cousin Vieva —"

"Very well, Cecily! You and Ruth may take your candy upstairs now that I am here — and not another piece to-night, my dears!"

Then Martha looked from Rodney's grin to Vieva's downcast eyes, and shook her head.

IV

THEIR young guest had not been long with the Ramsays before Martha realized that her friend Mrs. Brookes prophesied truly. She had written a note or two, told this and that and another of her friends that the young girl was visiting her — and Vieva was launched upon a social round of gayety full enough to have satisfied even a girl who had been accustomed to far more than had ever come Vieva's way. For a while, indeed, it was not unlike that earlier time when on the crest of their wave of financial success the young Ramsays had "gone in for" things which had afterwards rather palled upon them. It came about simply enough, for not all of her friends had chosen Martha's way; and, if truth be told, not all of them approved of it. Bert's sister Helen was one of those who openly scoffed at Martha's newer interests and who did not hesitate to berate her for them.

"There is a duty you owe to your husband and children in these things, Martha," Mrs.

Frothingham had said, more than once. "What do you propose to do, when it is time for Ruth to come out, if you neglect your social obligations now?"

Bert laughed; he was perhaps the only person who dared to laugh openly at his formidable sister. "We had counted on your looking out for that, Helen," he said. And that silenced Mrs. Frothingham, for she was not one to be called on in that cavalier fashion by any one for any purpose.

Mrs. Frothingham was a tall lady with a capable spine. She boasted that she never got tired — she left that to Essie, the other sister, who was delicate. Helen Ramsay had married, in her débutante year, a man many years her senior, and had mastered the Frothingham millions so early and completely that it almost seemed as though she had caused them to exist in the first place. Mr. Frothingham, however, had inherited them together with a very small stature and one of those frail constitutions that seemed created to cheat all expectations and to outlive their contemporaries and several younger generations. Mr. Frothingham had

always seemed old; at the time of Martha's marriage his little eyes had apparently been too tired to reflect the smile that even then seemed senile, and his little cold hands shook as they held Martha's when he welcomed her into the family. That he still lived was, in the minds of most who knew them, a fine tribute to his wife's efficiency; for it was she who arranged their method of life to its minutest detail. No one had more faith in the excellence of her management than Mrs. Frothingham's self; in fact, her faith was so serene that she had written a book on the subject of efficiency in the household. The book was the wonder of many, particularly of those young women — or old ones, for that matter — who at some time or another had to manage with one maid or two or — such being the inevitably impending chance of American domestic life — with none at all. For did not Mrs. Frothingham go minutely into the duties of the chief housemaid and the assistant scullery-maid, give admirable rules of conduct for the under-footman and the temperature of wines, dilate upon the advantages of having a time-clock and a cash-register in the servants'

sitting-room; and were not her menus the marvel of all who read them, with their so frequent sago puddings and their recurring boiled legs of mutton with white sauce, and the capers left out for economy? Oh, Mrs. Frothingham was efficient, and she brought her efficiency into all the affairs of life; whatever she undertook to do she carried through to a splendid finish. When she gave to charity she gave magnificently, spectacularly; and her favorite presents to her relatives at Christmas were crocheted slippers of crimson worsted, made by her own hands; Martha possessed four pairs (a trifle too large) and no less than seven which had been gifts to Bert; she could not fail to remember the number, for they always had to be looked after in the spring, and put away with fresh camphor. And yet, in spite of her efficiency — or possibly because of it — Mrs. Frothingham permitted herself a weakness — just one, although its manifestations, if one might call them so, were varied or exchanged from time to time. The weakness was for odd young men who wrote or painted or composed music; and by her interest in them Mrs. Frothingham made of herself, at

least in her own estimation, a patroness of the arts. So well known was her propensity for artistic youth, indeed, that when Genevieve wrote Martha about Vieva she had remarked that it was too bad, perhaps, that her girl was not artistic in any way — and Martha, and even Bert, had quite understood what she meant.

So it was not strange that Genevieve had not asked Mrs. Frothingham to take Vieva, although the Frothingham mansion crowned the very summit of High Street, whereas Robert's more modest abode clung but halfway up the hill; and Essie, his other sister and Genevieve's other cousin, was delicate: that, in the family mind, had always excused Mrs. Waite from every endeavor.

But Martha knew her duty and her sister-in-law well enough to notify the lady of Vieva's impending arrival, and to take the girl to call very soon after she had come. If Vieva was ever so little awed by the Frothingham state, with its footmen and all, she gave no more sign of it than of any emotion other than a pleasant acceptance of the situation, when Cousin Helen

pecked at her cheek and then held her off for inspection.

"Well, Genevieve-my-dear, you're very pretty," Mrs. Frothingham said, after a cool interval. Then, to Martha, "I suppose she has n't a thing fit to wear?"

Martha heard the girl's little gasp, saw her cheeks flush, and only afterward had time to admire her quickly recovered poise.

"Of course she *has!*" said Martha, looking Mrs. Frothingham straight in the eyes, and longing to slap her. "Why should n't she have?"

Mrs. Frothingham smiled. "Ah, I had forgotten Aunt Pussy's money! But if Genevieve is spending that on this child's finery she'll come to want later. Spaulding won't leave her anything!"

This time it was Martha's turn to gasp. Truly, she had never known Helen to be quite so outrageous, and she wondered at just what moment Vieva would burst into tears and have to be taken home.

But that, it seemed, was not Vieva's way. To Martha's amazement the young girl quietly

arose from the chair to which Helen had waved her, crossed the few feet of intervening space, and seated herself beside Mrs. Frothingham on the sofa. Vieva's cheeks were flaming, but she touched — ever so gently, ever so respectfully — Mrs. Frothingham's hand, then withdrew her own.

"I think it is wonderful of you to take such an interest in us, Cousin Helen," said she. "I certainly do appreciate it!"

There was silence in the room. Martha looked at Helen, looked at Vieva; there was not a shade of anything but utter respect on the girl's face, not a shade of anything but gratitude in her voice. Martha was dumb in admiration; but as for the dumbness of Helen . . .

Then from the adjoining room, beyond the heavy velvet curtains, there came the unmistakable sound of a chuckle — a chuckle followed by a cough, as though the effort of laughing had been too much for the person who had overheard. Vieva's eyes widened a little; except for that, one would have said that she had not heard either the laugh or the cough, for her sweet, quiet look remained placidly upon

Mrs. Frothingham. But the sound had a different effect upon Helen.

"That is your Cousin Andrew," she said, indicating the curtains. "You may go and make his acquaintance, Genevieve!"

"Oh, thank you!" said Vieva, smiling, and looking quite as though she meant it.

Mrs. Frothingham watched her disappear between the curtains; then said, "Humh!" Then to Martha, "I suppose Genevieve has sent her up here in the hope that we'll marry her off!"

"I think Genevieve wants her merely to have a girl's good time," said Martha. "Marriage is not the end and aim of —"

"Nonsense! Of course it is! And Genevieve was wise to send her to you instead of to me — although of course I should have declined, if she had asked me to take her. Quite impossible — most disturbing to Andrew, most demoralizing to the servants. I never have people staying in the house. But I'll do what I can for her otherwise. I'll get the Wilmers to give her a party — they're under obligations to Andrew. And of course you will do something yourselves. You'd

better make it a dance, and have good favors — some of those queer war-dolls will do — they're quite the fashion, and you can buy them from my branch of the Aid."

They talked on for a while — or, rather, the elder lady talked while Martha perforce listened. But presently she felt that she could not live through many more minutes of Helen, and rose to go. "You are very kind, Helen," she said, "but really I am sure that Robert and I can manage for Vieva very well. I brought the child here because I thought you would wish to see her —"

Few people finished their sentences when with Mrs. Frothingham. "And be sure you don't lead her into any of those occupations of yours, Martha, — so unfeminine, all that talk about reforming things and votes for women — as if any woman needs to vote, my dear! Or wishes to, for that matter! Well, Genevieve, how do you like your Cousin Andrew?"

They had walked into the other room, and Vieva arose from a low stool whereon she had been sitting beside Mr. Frothingham's chair. His small, shaking hand was still holding hers,

but Vieva did not seem in the least to mind. At Mrs. Frothingham's question the two exchanged a glance as friendly as if they had been cronies, and the aged Andrew laughed. He looked at his wife, and drew the young girl down until he could speak in her ear, close enough to be unheard by the others.

"Don't let her bully you!" said he; and added, aloud, "You come again! Come to-morrow!"

And to the surprise of every one in the room Vieva bent and dropped a fleeting kiss somewhere in the neighborhood of Mr. Frothingham's thin temple. Then she followed the others out of the room — for Mrs. Frothingham had swept out, and Martha, perforce, had to follow.

At the drawing-room door Helen proved herself most affable. "I have never seen Andrew so pleased with any one before!" she said. "You may come frequently, my dear, and read aloud to him — it will be good experience for you, and leave me free for other things!"

"Oh, I should love to!" said Vieva — and said it as though she meant it.

Mrs. Frothingham smiled.

"Perhaps you may stay to luncheon, sometimes!" she said. "That will be something to write your mother about, eh? And — you may call me aunt, my dear — Aunt Helen; and Mr. Frothingham shall be Uncle Andrew!"

"Oh, thank you — Aunt Helen!" said Vieva, with an upward look of innocent eyes that it was a pity Uncle Andrew was not there to see.

For the life of her Martha could not decide whether the look was as genuinely innocent as it seemed; but at any rate it was, for the moment, too much for her. She started toward the door which a portly footman was holding open.

"Good-bye, Helen," she called over her shoulder. The footman's chin went up ever so little, and Mrs. Frothingham scowled; she detested a raised tone. "Come along, Vieva!"

Once on the street, Martha could not refrain from a teasing look at her young guest. "You captivated the patriarch, my dear!" said she. "Mind you don't lead him into a flirtation!"

Vieva dimpled. "Oh, Cousin Martha!" she protested. Then she added, "You know, Cousin Martha, I think that poor old man is — is lonely!"

"Lonely! With Helen, and fourteen servants!"

"Yes, I know! But I do think he is, just the same! And — and I think he'd be a — a dear, Cousin Martha, if he were — well, cheered up a little!"

Martha laughed outright. The vision of a cheerful Andrew!

"Well, honey, by all means cheer him up, if you think he needs it!" she said, and added half under her breath, "And if you don't mind his holding your hand!"

"Of course I don't — why, it's just like a baby's holding your hand, Cousin Martha!"

Martha's face softened. It might be possible, after all, that the innocence of Vieva's eyes was real; certainly her friendliness and kindliness were — and her courage! Her courage — oh, it would be long before Martha would forget the look on Helen's face and old Andrew's chuckle from beyond the portières.

When she described that little scene to Mrs. Brookes, later in the afternoon, Ann sagely remarked: —

"The girl is just very much of the present, if

she *is* a backwoods parson's daughter, that's all! That was why she got the best of Helen! A few generations ago Vieva would have fainted at Helen's remark; forty years ago she would have been too hurt and confused to do anything but weep. Now she puts Helen in her place, and wins old Andrew's heart!"

"And what about Helen's dates? And Andrew's?"

"Oh, Helen! The Helens are eternal — they are, and were, and are to be! And Andrew is still a man, in spite of his genuine antiquity — and man, Martha Ramsay, man the world over is still the same old Adam!"

They laughed, and presently Ann added: "But Vieva does seem to be able to look out for herself, does n't she, and to have some spirit! I am glad of that! Rodney *is* such a dunce — he might just as probably have fallen in love with a little clinging vine of a thing who would let herself get frowzy by the time they'd been married a year, and cry her eyes out when poor Rod stayed late at a class dinner! Now, from what you tell me of this girl — well, the men will *think* she's a clinging vine, anyway!"

"From what I've seen of Vieva, my dear, I think you're jumping rather fast, taking things so for granted!" said Martha.

Ann Brookes grew grave. "I am! I know I am! Rod is jealous already because she had four other bunches of flowers at the Harrods' dance and left his at home!"

V

During the first days of Vieva's visit Martha discovered — which might have been so evident as scarcely to need discovering at all — that the girl's presence was going to add much to the already crowded detail of her days. It never seemed quite possible to Martha to drop anything she had once begun, to delegate to others what might be her own share of any work in hand; rather, with the sureness of perfect health and an untroubled mind, was she apt to add to her burdens, to take upon herself more and more, to crowd another day's work into a full week. She loved alike the sense of authority and of responsibility; she liked to know that her associates looked to her for guidance. She had a gift for leadership, for organizing, and she loved to employ it. Already she had gone far, and this winter promised to carry her further; there was nothing that she could drop, but always more and more and more that she found to do; and now there was a young

girl to be looked after, with all that that implied!

And yet, except in this one regard, before she had been with them more than a week or two Vieva's presence came to be accepted in the household as one of the established facts. On the late afternoon of the day of their first call on Mrs. Frothingham, Martha had hurried home from a long session of a penny-lunch committee, with a conscience-stricken sense of having deserted her Robert. Had she considered, she might have known that Vieva, after the first shyness and the fatigue of the journey had worn off, would be quite able to set Mr. Ramsay at his ease. Yet on the way home Martha had said to herself, —

"I shall just have to convince him some way, poor lamb, that he really need not have Vieva on his mind when he's at home. I am not going to have him bored or bothered — not but what a girl in the house will do him good! There is no reason on earth why he should n't be shaken up a bit, at his age!"

Yet after the adventure of the morning, and especially if she had remembered the easy con-

quest of Mr. Frothingham, she might have trusted Vieva!

She heard Bert's hearty laugh as she entered the house, and when she went into the living-room Cecily jumped from the arm of her father's chair and came to throw herself on Martha in a tempestuous embrace. Bert was in his accustomed big chair beside the fire, and Vieva arose from the other — the one which was usually Martha's. Bert was still grinning — it was quite obvious that he had been the entertained, this afternoon, and not the entertainer. The air of the room was heavy with the scent of roses; an enormous mass of them was on the table.

"Oh, mummy, look what Vieva's got! Daddy says he wishes *he* could make Uncle Andrew come across. *What* did Uncle Andrew cross, mother? I do so wish I'd seen him!"

Martha joined in the laughter of the others, then remembered to be amazed.

"Uncle Andrew!" she exclaimed. "Not those roses? Why, Vieva!"

In her amazement she dropped into the nearest chair.

"That's what I tell her!" Robert began, while Vieva only smiled demurely.

But again Cecily's treble piped up.

"Daddy says he'd let Uncle Andrew hold *his* hand if that would make him come across! Would n't it be funny to see Uncle Andrew holding daddy's —"

"Cecily," said Martha, "why are n't you upstairs? And where are Ruth and Bobby?"

"Well, Bobby is so *young*, mother, — he's in bed by this time, I suppose! And Ruth has home-work to do. I just thought I'd keep daddy and Cousin Vieva company awhile — I was wondering whether Rodney would come in again — but I suppose he did n't find any bargain to-day!"

"Cecily, that will do!" said Mr. Ramsay. "To bed with you!"

And Cecily, obeying the voice of authority, went. But Martha had the child in her mind all the while she was hearing how Uncle Andrew's wonderful roses had surprised Vieva, and how she had told young Brookes that he really could not possibly come again this afternoon, and how Cousin Robert had come home

early, and what a jolly little talk they had had, all about mamma and old times that Cousin Robert remembered so well, when mamma was a girl. . . .

She was thinking of Cecily, too, when later that night she was sitting in front of her dressing-table braiding her hair; the child had a way of drawing unto herself by the magnetism of an inquisitive mind odd bits of information which were, to say the least, undesirable, and of producing them at unexpected times and places; sometimes it was borne in upon her, uneasily, that in Cecily's little self there was a problem which she was not quite meeting. She was a careful mother; she made it a point to be home to luncheon with the tots almost every day, to plan their days so that they should be full and happy and profitable. Ruth was as sweet and amenable a little damsel as any mother could wish for, and Bobby was still under the care of the devoted Hedwig; but Cecily — Cecily was the odd one, the unaccountable one —

Then, in the midst of her pondering, Bert drifted into the room.

"I say, Pats, that girl's rather a pretty little thing, is n't she?"

"She's pretty," said Martha, "and she's a dear."

Bert walked about, smoking, — which he never did in Martha's room unless he were thinking very hard.

"I've always been mighty fond of Genevieve," he said presently. "She has n't had an easy life of it. We'll have to do what we can for her little girl."

He said it quite as though the idea had originated with himself. Martha, glancing at him, realized that to him it truly had become as though it had been his own plan to bring Vieva north; it was by no means the first time she had seen him thus adopt an idea and make it his own. It was one of the things she could count upon with him — he might oppose or argue a thing at first, but when it was accomplished it established itself as a part of his unalterable scheme of life. Now she saw that he was going even farther, for when he spoke again it was as though he not only felt Vieva's coming to have been of his initiative, but also that he

was somewhat remorsefully conscious of imposing her upon his Martha!

"You know, Pats, I think you're awfully good to have her here," he said. "You always *are* good to my people. I don't know that I've happened to speak of it before, but I've noticed it. You know you *are* a wonder, Pats!"

Martha's face grew tender; there was a slightly stinging sensation in her eyes.

"Come and kiss me!" she said; and Robert kissed her emphatically, not for an instant wondering why she asked him to, not in the least endeavoring to analyze the source of her emotion, taking it simply and thankfully as one of the blessings incidental to their ever-blessed companionship.

Thus the difficulty as to Bert's being bored or bothered resolved itself into nothingness, and, moreover, he showed himself unexpectedly willing to go out with them in the evenings. To be sure, Martha made it easy for him, as far as she could in those little affairs of studs and fresh waistcoats and various other details apt to have become burdensome to the man grown

indolent in fireside ease. And she tried not to tax his patience too far. Whenever it was possible to do so she got one or another of their friends who had young daughters of their own to take Vieva on with them, and the faithful Hedwig was willing enough to wait up with hot cocoa and the other small attentions. But not infrequently Bert expressed something more than a willingness to go with them — a state of mind which Martha unconsciously dated from a certain evening when they were, for once, alone and at home. Vieva had very soon become proficient in such of the newer dances as she had not learned at school, and more than once she had twitted Bert on his not dancing.

"*Why* does n't Cousin Robert dance, Cousin Martha?" she asked, this evening, when they three were in the living-room, and Bert had pushed her accustomed chair a little closer to the fire for Martha, and insisted upon Vieva's taking his own, while he prowled about the room in a way which made Martha rather fidgety. "Why does n't he dance *now*, I mean — because I know perfectly well that anybody like Cousin Robert *used* to dance!"

"What do you mean by anybody like Cousin Robert?" Bert asked, standing in front of her and looking down at the upturned face.

Vieva dimpled, then looked demure. "I mean anybody as nice as you," said she, "and — as nice-looking!"

Martha had always known that Bert was ever the least tiniest bit in the world fond of his looks; but how, she wondered vaguely, half-sleepily — for she was scarcely attending to their nonsense — how did Vieva come to know it? She did not altogether like Vieva's taking his little weakness thus for granted; of course she herself thought it was darling of Bert to be that tiny bit pleased with himself, but she was not at all sure that it might not appear rather silly to any one else. She looked up; Bert was grinning back at Vieva.

"He used to dance in his — his youth, did n't he, Cousin Martha?" the girl persisted.

"In my youth! I like that!" said Bert.

"Of course he did, Vieva," said Martha. "And he adored it. That is why he does not dance now — his feelings got so terribly hurt when he went to a ball after a year or so of not

dancing, and found himself out of it — a wall-flower! He has never recovered!"

Vieva jumped up. "Then he has simply got to learn!" she cried. "You don't mind our playing the victrola, do you, Cousin Martha?"

And Martha, amused and sleepy, watched them through half-closed lids, and drifted off into short lapses of unconsciousness, and woke again to smile again at the sound of Bert's voice as he painstakingly counted, counted, or exultantly asked, "Did I get it right that time?" or cried, "By Jove! It's not so hard when you're on to it, is it? Did you see us that time, Pats?" or again as he and Vieva laughed over his mistakes, and went gayly on to try again. And at last, when Martha's returns to consciousness had become more difficult and her sleepiness no longer to be endured, and she was leading Vieva away for some needed beauty-sleep, Bert's last words, called out as he closed the victrola, were, —

"I say, Vieva, you're a great little old teacher, you know!"

From that evening Bert showed a decreasing unwillingness for those forms of social activity

which should draw him from his comfortable fireside, and Martha observed this with a sense of gratitude and proceeded to make the most of it. How often, indeed, had she not made the most of Bert's good nature, of his willingness to help her out, his eagerness to spare her anything that he might do for her or for their life together! He had long since fallen into the way of doing little things for her — even little, everyday, homely things which in the earlier days of their marriage she had jealously regarded as prerogatives of her own by no means to be performed by any one else. Then, during the later years when she had given herself more and more to those newer occupations which took so much of her strength and time, and took them increasingly, how often had not Bert — the old darling — done his work and a good deal of her own as well? Never consciously had Martha shirked her duty; but so preciously close was their partnership that she unconsciously felt it to be quite the same, if Bert did a thing, as though she did it herself.

So as time went on it was not strange that, as Bert became more accustomed to Vieva's

presence, Martha should come to rely upon him for much that she had expected to be obliged to do alone, or at best with an unwilling husband in attendance. Her own affairs had been rather neglected during the first weeks of Vieva's visit, and much of her work was waiting, "piled up," to be attended to. When things in her office at the Civic Club and at suffrage headquarters became too pressing longer to be neglected, Martha had tried to attend to those and her social duties as well; and then, mercifully, there was blessed old Bert not unwilling to help her out — as he had so many times before, but never quite so amazingly.

For it long continued to amaze Martha that he should not only be willing to help her with Vieva, but that he should actually be enjoying it! The first two or three times she asked him to play chaperon while she herself either tumbled into bed or worked late on some committee or in her office with an urgent secretary, Bert had, indeed, grumbled; but the grumble was faint-hearted, and held none of the pained surprise, followed by acquiescence, which a man uses when he really objects to doing what his

wife asks; and before long she found that she did not have to urge, nor even to suggest. Bert and Vieva arranged things very nicely between them!

And that, she told herself, was just what he had so often done before, rather than bother her. What an old love he was! How different her life would have been if she had not had the courage to marry him in the face of all that silly family opposition! What if she had not had faith in him! What if she had married — and even the thought of it now seemed somehow almost an impropriety! — what if she had married one of the others, nice though they had been, some of them now most excellent husbands and fathers, others eligible bachelors, like a certain Henry Wadsleigh whom she still met occasionally! No, the very thought was unthinkable! There was no one, no one like Bert, with his funny boyishness, and his business cleverness, and his blessed, whole-souled devotion to herself — old darling that he was! Who else but Bert would help her out — so nobly help her out! — with Vieva, and do it as he did everything else for his Martha, without

the least complaint, just as though it were a matter of course that he should get into his evening clothes — that were ever so little a bit snug in the arm-holes and about the waist — night after night — and be up at all hours, and have to go downtown to business when he could not possibly have had sleep enough! Martha sympathized with him most of all on that score, even while she accepted his sacrifice; for a longing for sleep, a deadening weight of fatigue which was still with her to some extent in the mornings, was part of the price she paid for her many crowded activities. Truly, she sometimes wondered, especially toward the end of a busy day, when it seemed as though she could not have made another effort if her life itself had depended upon it, what would she have done with Vieva if it had not been for Bert's goodness!

That was the winter when the suffrage question was to come up in the Legislature for the second time; the Civic Club was trying to introduce the general adoption of penny lunches in the schools, and Martha was chairman of that committee, which entailed so much busi-

ness that she had been given a room of her own in the clubhouse and a secretary; she had to resign from the chairmanship of the hospital board, but was still active on its membership; and the thousand and one other things which had held her for so long continued to claim as much of her time as she could spare for them. Her friends, too, — or at least those whose occupations kept step with her own, — had a way of dropping into her office to talk things over, or of hunting her down, cornering her here and there to get in a word or two between engagements. Only the habit of a well-poised mind and the possession of perfect health could have made such a winter possible for any one; but as the weeks wore on even Martha was increasingly conscious of the wear and tear of it.

And with all her activity outside of home, there was, above and through and beyond and inextricably interwoven with everything else, that home itself. Her housekeeping was modern, expert, sufficiently close to scientific standards of the day to have given her quite a reputation as an authority — although she had never rivaled her sister-in-law's efficiency in kind!

Mrs. Frothingham scorned Martha's housekeeping; she unconsciously reverted to the belief of earlier or more primitive generations, that what was easily done could not be well done — and Martha's house seemed to go on of itself. Yet the routine of her servants, the activities of her children, the daily menus and daily comfort of her family were the first considerations of each day, all attended to as far as might be before she sallied forth to the wider sphere of influence; attended to as far as might be, since the most efficient of routines has a way of tangling itself up at inconvenient moments and the best-regulated and best-trained of children have infinite possibilities of the unexpected.

Of all this Martha was well aware. The children, particularly, were seldom for long out of her mind. She had never been altogether able to dismiss a slumbering anxiety on their account, happy and healthy though they were; she had never been one of the mothers who take their children lightly; perhaps her anxiety had lasted longer than it does with most because of the very intensity of her determination to do

everything for them — every least thing, to the minutest germ-proof detail, in the most approved modern manner.

There were various contagious diseases among the children of the hill neighborhood that winter, and while she knew that her three would be just as apt to come down with measles or whooping-cough if she were at home in the window darning stockings as they would be if she were downtown, yet she had that dim uneasiness about them which every anxious mother knows. Bobby, she thought, was pale, and that troubled her, so that she found herself with foolish longings to telephone home at odd moments to ask if he were well. Ruth was one of those rare children apparently brought into a troubled world only to give it light and comfort; she never had to worry about Ruth. But Cecily — that funny little unknown, unsuspected Cecily! Sometimes, after some new oddness — or awfulness — of Cecily's she would wake in the night to wonder whether the child might not be needing her mother during the day, whether she might not owe it to Cecily to stay at home with her. Once or twice she even

carried about with her a half-formed resolution to keep Cecily with her more, only to have it happen that Cecily would be an angel-child for long enough to persuade Martha that her fears were groundless, mere hysterical indications of fatigue. But of all this she said nothing to Bert; she was glad that he, at least, was having a good time. Of Bert — bless him! — and of Vieva she felt that she need not have a care.

Not that they were for long out of her thoughts, any more than the children were. Vieva was really no trouble at all; she had only affectionate praises for the child when she wrote to Genevieve; and Bert was just the one fixed point of goodness and comfort in the busy, complicated world. Yet for all her loving appreciation of him, she failed entirely to understand her Robert's state of mind.

As a matter of fact, Bert was scarcely aware that he was helping Martha out with Vieva; to help Martha had so long been a matter of course, like reminding her to put on her rubbers or to take aspirin when she had been out in the rain! When things have reached that status they may be sweet and desirable and in-

finitely to be cherished, but they are not exciting; and rare, indeed, is the male creature which does not like excitement and welcome change. It is the trait of character which shows itself in the small boy's trotting along for weary, dusty miles behind a band, and in youth's thirst for adventure; it persists throughout the masculine half of the human race so invariably as to seem a fundamental part of its structure, like the granite of the New England hills, and with outcroppings as surprising and unexpected. Most men retain through life enough of the boy to make them grasp at any good time that comes along and make the most of it unthinkingly, without analyzing it, content to enjoy it while it lasts, accepting it as a boy accepts a treat; Robert Livingston Ramsay was, happily, not exceptional, but, happily, an everyday, average man. He had enjoyed his boyhood, enjoyed college, enjoyed the push and shove and fight of business, and very much enjoyed his home and his family; now he was enjoying having a nice young girl in the house, enjoying the novelty of blue eyes raised wistfully — or mischievously — to his; even enjoying the feeling

of proprietorship which his position of host gave him toward this pretty young creature who was increasingly attractive to other men —and younger men!— than himself. In short, Robert was having a good time entirely on his own account; that was wholly and precisely his attitude, and it had no intricacies, no complications, no subtleties!

VI

VIEVA, too, was enjoying herself — as, indeed, what young girl would not, under similar circumstances! She had her moments of misgiving, when she thought of the little parsonage in the far-away Southern mountains; but for five years — ever since the blessed windfall of Aunt Pussy's money — she had been so little a part of the household which she called "home" that during the few months she had passed there she had been more of a stranger than not — a stranger to the monotonous life, if not to the affections of her father and mother. The Reverend Mr. Spaulding had long since fallen into that state of mind which attributes all manner of wickedness to a society which has not gone out of its way to befriend him; he had not had a particularly good time in the world, and it was a vile place whose pleasures were sinful and whose gayeties were vicious. He loved his child, in a manner and to a degree that were seemly in one whose affections should not be

set upon the things of this life, but she had always seemed something of a stranger to him, as though belonging more to his wife than to himself. And, indeed, the bond between Genevieve and their daughter was close enough; Genevieve lived for her girl, and welcomed any sacrifice, even the great one of separation, that was for her good. Vieva was thirteen when Genevieve's little fortune came into her possession; the one thing it meant to the mother was that her child need not be the victim of the life she had unknowingly chosen for herself when she had married against the wishes of her aunt and cousins — who as her closest relatives had constituted themselves her advisers and the judges of her conduct. For thirteen years Genevieve had borne in her secret heart a dread of being unable to give Vieva at least the advantages she herself had received; not even the prospect of five years of boarding-school for her girl, and consequently as many years of separation, dimmed her satisfaction in being able to provide them. Nor, when Vieva had come home with the long white roll of her diploma, had Genevieve been content to keep her there. She

wrote to Martha Ramsay, with whom she had kept up a desultory correspondence since the winter Martha had spent in Carolina for her health, years before, and sent for mail-order catalogues and fashion books. For herself Genevieve could endure the life in the little parsonage, the companionship of the paralytic mother-in-law, the haphazard housekeeping which was lightened but little even after Aunt Pussy's legacy made it possible for her to have a maid servant. But she could not endure any of that for Vieva, and somehow she made the girl understand it, after her first qualms of homesickness, which were mostly, after all, conscientious misgivings. Not that Vieva was so much the daughter of the Reverend Mr. Spaulding that she must take toll of her pleasures by harboring any thought of their being wrong; what scruples she had were on the score of leaving her mother, now that school was over and she could be at home. But Genevieve made it clear that her happiness lay in Vieva's good times — and Vieva was young enough very soon to accept her mother's word for it and simply to enjoy herself to the utmost.

And enjoyment seemed, indeed, to seek her out. It was not long before all of the world to which the Ramsays had introduced her was taking Vieva to its heart. Her little Southern way of forgetting her *r*'s and prolonging her vowels, her blonde daintiness, her dimpled, demure little smile, were not more attractive than her frank pleasure in everything; and she possessed, moreover, that indefinable allurement for the other sex which is by no means dependent upon youth or beauty, however frequently it may be found with those desirable qualities. The young men of Hilton did not have to be urged by mothers or sisters to be politely attentive to Mrs. Ramsay's young guest; if Rodney Brookes was the most faithful of her swains, he had rivals a-plenty. Vieva gave no least sign of preference for any one of them, but had a capable, wholesome little way of managing them all. She smiled alike on the young men, on baby Bobby, on Cousin Robert, and on — Uncle Andrew!

Martha and Bert found it amusing enough that Mr. Frothingham should have become one of the most attentive of the girl's admirers. On

Vieva's side the friendship between the two was pretty enough. It came to be an unvarying part of her days that she should walk up the hill to the formidable mansion on its summit and spend half an hour or so with the old man; then, gradually, she began staying up for a longer time, or motoring with him, and if anything kept her away the old gentleman would very soon telephone, peevish and querulous. Martha often wondered what Helen thought of the odd friendship; she was soon to know.

Mrs. Frothingham's big, plum-colored limousine passed Martha one day, then drew up to the curb, and its owner beckoned imperatively.

"Get in here — I want to talk to you," said Mrs. Frothingham. And although Martha was hurrying toward a committee meeting, already a few minutes late because she had had to see about shoes for Bobby, she stepped into the car and seated herself beside her sister-in-law.

"I suppose you've discovered by this time," Mrs. Frothingham said, "that that girl of Genevieve's is a minx."

"Oh, Vieva? I'm not sure that I know what a minx is, Helen!"

"Nonsense! Every woman was born knowing that!" said Mrs. Frothingham with a firm expression. "This Vieva — though I don't know why she is n't to be called Genevieve, if that's her name! — this Vieva is designing."

Martha moved impatiently. "Oh, now, Helen!" she began. "I'm sorry, but I really have n't time —"

But Mrs. Frothingham went on as though she had not spoken.

"Designing! She comes to my house every day. I suppose you won't deny that you know what she's after?"

Martha felt herself flushing; really, Helen was becoming more and more impossible! But she had no chance to speak.

Mrs. Frothingham leaned forward impressively. "She is after — Thomas!" said she.

"What on earth *do* you mean, Helen?" Martha managed to ask.

"Just what I say," Helen firmly repeated. "That girl is a minx, and she comes to my house every day to meet Thomas."

"But — *Thomas?*" Martha questioned, thinking wildly that she had never heard Mr. Frothingham called anything but Andrew.

"Certainly — Thomas, Thomas Aquinas Martin. Surely you recognize the name! You don't? Well! If you paid more attention to things that are worth while, Martha, and less to all this folderol about votes and meddling with what has got along very well without you until now, you would know that young Martin — Thomas Aquinas Martin — is one of the rising lights of modern poetry. As it is, I do not see how you have missed his wonderful little mystic gem, 'Dew-drops on a City's Pave.'"

"I am terribly behind the times," said Martha, and hoped that she said it meekly.

Mrs. Frothingham seemed mollified. "I will send you my copy of his poems," she said, "if you will keep it away from the children."

"Oh, are they — that sort? But my children are too young to understand —"

"They are *not* 'that sort,'" said Mrs. Frothingham. "I meant keep them away from the children's *hands*, naturally! Mr. Martin is an *estimable* young man. He has his poems

printed privately, presentation copies, you know. Therefore one values them especially."

"I see," said Martha. "But, really, Helen, I cannot see Vieva and a poet —"

"He is a poet, yes! But his father, my dear, was that San Francisco contractor who made so many millions after the earthquake. Politics! you know what *that* means. Young Martin is only too well aware of how his millions were made — therefore he turns to the higher things. But that girl Genevieve *knows* about the millions!"

"Oh, but how can she know? And even —"

"She knows, for Andrew told her. Martin comes to my house every day to confer with me, and *four times* lately Genevieve has *succeeded* in meeting him there."

Martha laughed. By this time she was quite aware of Vieva's magnetism for the male, but remembering young Rodney Brookes, and Vieva's way of flushing when he came in unexpectedly, she had not much faith in Helen's theory. And a Thomas Aquinas — absurd! She said as much.

"Oh, be blind if you will, Martha," said

Mrs. Frothingham. "But I know! *I*—know Thomas! A poetic imagination — a sensitive soul! And if you could have *seen* the way he looked at Vieva yesterday, you would believe me!"

"But I thought you considered it rather our duty to 'marry her off,' Helen! Why not to Mr. Martin?"

Mrs. Frothingham's head moved in a manner that might vulgarly be described as a toss. "That girl — and a poet!"

"But poets have always appreciated a pretty face! And she's a very *nice* girl, Helen! Does n't Mr. Frothingham think so?"

"Andrew is in his dotage!" said Andrew's wife.

Martha was inwardly quivering with merriment. "Shall I tell Vieva not to go to your house any more, Helen? Is that what you mean —"

Mrs. Frothingham turned squarely toward her sister-in-law, and smiled. "My dear, if you would!" said she. "I suggested something of the kind to Andrew, and he was — he was — er — really quite disa — er — strange, about

it! I never *knew* Andrew to hold out for anything which I did not consider for his good, before! That girl —"

This time it was Martha who interrupted. "Oh, if Mr. Frothingham thinks that he needs a young person to amuse him, of course I would not *dream* of keeping Vieva away, Helen! Not for worlds! We all think so much of dear Mr. Frothingham, you know! And now I must trot along —"

She smiled and nodded to Mrs. Frothingham, and stepped down to the curb. As she walked hurriedly away to her committee meeting, however, and, indeed, during the meeting itself, she smiled more than once. So that was the way Helen was taking Vieva's friendship for the venerable Andrew! And he was in his dotage! How much, she wondered, of Helen's anxiety was on behalf of her protégé, and how much on account of Andrew? She had no faith in Helen's theory of Vieva's ambitions toward the poet and his millions. The child had shown no least preference for those young men who had more to spend than others; she smiled alike on all men — that demure little smile in which

there seemed to lurk something fatal to masculine peace of mind! How much would she not have given, she thought, to have been a silent witness to the girl's encounters with Helen's poet — his gaze wandering from his patroness to Vieva, and Vieva's eyes just meeting his glance before her lashes drooped. . . . She wondered whether old Andrew had been an observer — an amused observer — of it all, and was inclined to think that he would not be apt to miss anything so delectable. Somehow, since that first call of Vieva's she had found herself with a new understanding of Andrew. Before, she had thought of him as one thinks of a mummy — interesting in its way, but scarcely alive. But with that chuckle he had become alive for Martha; so much alive that she wondered at Helen's easy way of dismissing his affection for the young girl. Not that he should n't be fond of her — his wife's cousin, a third generation younger than himself; but it was not like Helen to be complaisant toward anything which had not originated with herself. Well, anyway, Martha was glad that Vieva was nice to the old man. She must tell her so, and, in-

cidentally, find out about Thomas Aquinas. She little suspected how soon she was to meet the poet in person.

After Vieva came, Martha tried to be at home for tea on those afternoons when the girl had no other engagements; there were invariably a group of young people gathered in her pretty living-room on those days, for although the majority of the youth of Hilton worked downtown, yet there were enough of them who had early office hours to permit of their being on hand in the late afternoons; and where the youths foregather there will the maids be found.

On the afternoon of her meeting with Mrs. Frothingham, Martha, from her place back of the tea-table, observed the entrance of a strange young man who did not seem as much at home as the others. Vieva immediately separated herself from the chattering group in the farther window-seat and greeted the stranger, and a moment thereafter Martha was offering the poet a cup of tea. He wore the horn-rimmed spectacles which Bert so detested and a curious article of neckwear in the form of a soft stock

and cravat of black satin. Otherwise he was quite presentable, and Martha surmised that he must have some of the qualities of his father the contractor, for he showed himself persistent enough to try to outstay Rodney Brookes, with the result that they finally departed together, after the manner of jealous youth.

Thereafter Mr. Martin was a good deal in evidence. His offerings of orchids and monstrously big roses far outshone poor Rodney's little weekly bunch of violets, and the business of being a poet on a great many thousands a year gave him many more free hours than Rodney could claim, with his modest place in the cage at the bank — incidentally the bank which had been Mr. Frothingham's in earlier years. Martha could only watch and wonder, but as far as she could see Vieva was in no way discriminating between the two — and there were at least two others who might be considered "in the running." She kept them all at that safe point where each thinks the other the favored one, and only on Bert and Uncle Andrew did she smile always.

Then, one day, Martha noticed on Vieva's

hand a ring — a lovely, girlish thing of a costliness to be recognized at a glance. Martha was startled; there were people in the room when she first observed it, and on that afternoon the poet was the favored recipient of Vieva's attention, and Rodney lost in the sulks, so that Martha had to take pity on him and all but forcibly draw Mr. Martin to her side. But even then the poet's gaze remained fondly — or fatuously, as Martha told herself — on Vieva, and Rodney refused to be cheered, and left early, very stiff and rather pale.

It was not until the guests had departed, and Ruth and Cecily had come dancing downstairs to greet their father, that Martha again thought of the ring, and then it was Cecily who reminded her.

The child was on Bert's knee, with one little arm about his neck. "Daddy, you don't know who gave Vieva her new ring!" she said.

Bert looked, startled, at Vieva's hand. She held it up, displaying the jewel, with her own little sidelong glance, her teeth pressing her lip.

"What's that! A ring?"

Vieva flushed, and held her hand out to

Martha. Oh, the thing was exquisite, delicately fashioned of platinum and jewels, yet simple enough for a girl whose first jewel it was.

"You don't know who gave her that!" chanted Cecily.

Bert glanced at the sparkling ring on the pretty hand and looked away. "I do not wish to know!" said he, with great dignity.

"Well, I'll tell you anyhow!" Cecily was never deterred in her revelations by the other person's unwillingness to hear them! "It was Uncle Andrew! That's who gave it to her! And it is n't Christmas either!"

Bert's frown disappeared, and his lips parted in a grin. Martha laughed outright.

"Uncle Andrew, Vieva?" she asked. "Really?"

"Yes, Cousin Martha! Was n't it dear of him? He sent it this afternoon by his man Wilkinson, with such a funny message! 'Mr. Frothingham's compliments, Miss, and the box contains a small compensation for a half-hour of this morning.'"

"Gracious, Vieva! He does n't mean to —

to pay you —" Martha began, and found that she could not finish.

Vieva was smiling in her demure little way; then she laughed and bit her lip.

"No, Cousin Martha, not in the way you mean!" she said. "Uncle Andrew and I have awfully good times together — you would n't suspect what a dear Uncle Andrew is, unless you knew him pretty well, would you? I just love to read to him and play pinochle with him — he knows I do! And we were having a game this morning — and Aunt Helen was out — I think she was n't expecting Mr. Martin until later, but — but he came early, and Jackson made a mistake and showed him into Uncle Andrew's library, and — and of course that ended our pinochle, and Mr. Martin read us a poem he had just written, and — and — well, I think that must have been what Uncle Andrew meant, Cousin Martha!"

Martha laughed. "Good Heavens, Vieva, are his poems as bad as that?" she asked.

But Vieva only smiled and took off her ring so that Ruth and Cecily, who were tense with admiration, might try it on "to see how it

looks" — which they did, turning their little arms with airy gestures which must have been inherited from generations of preening grandmothers, since never, surely, had children of the present generation seen the like. And now Bert, also, was willing to look at the ring.

Martha noticed his expression as he laughed; if it had been any one else but Bert, she would almost have said that he looked relieved, but of course in Bert that would have been too, too ridiculous!

"Uncle Andrew! Good Lord, Vieva, has the old man had a change of heart? How did you do it?" said he, laughing.

And Martha watched Cecily's eyes grow round, and was quite prepared for the loud stage-whisper which was directed to her a moment later —

"Mother, *how* can anybody change their heart?"

"Is it all right for me to take a ring from Uncle Andrew, Cousin Martha?" Vieva asked, and flushed as Martha and Bert laughed together.

"Well, rather, my dear!" Martha assured

her. "You can take even a jewel from your mother's cousin!"

Later, as she thought over it all and remembered poor Rodney's face as he had looked at the ring, Martha told herself that she was not going to let Vieva flirt too outrageously with him, for he was a dear boy, and just the sort she hoped her Bobby would be, some day. Ann had invited them, and a dozen or so of their closer friends, to her house on the next evening, just to push back the rugs and dance; that would mean, Martha knew, one of the simple, jolly times they always had at Ann's house, since nothing more elaborate was possible to the Brookes's pocketbook. Martha promised herself that she would find time to drop an encouraging whisper in Rodney's ear.

VII

But the morrow, as it happened, turned out to be one of those days that come to most of us sooner or later, when every perversity of life and a good many of its perplexities suddenly discover themselves and pop up in our path and force themselves upon us and nag at us and make faces at us until we succumb to their demands; and in Martha's case such a day could complicate itself many times over.

Always on Tuesdays she walked downtown with Bert, for the distance to his office was just enough for proper exercise, and as Bert was his own chauffeur their modest automobile was used only as a pleasure vehicle, and scarcely at all during the months of snow. The meeting of the hospital board was at ten, and it was good to get part of the week's marketing done in the hour before. Tuesday was the one day on which they could invariably count upon the walk, and it was a custom dear to both of them — to swing down the hill in step with each

other, along the increasingly crowded pavements of the lower part of the city, seemed to be snatching at a moment and an experience which was all the more their own because it was not a part of the inevitable routine of the comfortably married. It gave them a little feeling of sweethearting, and was an hour which they rarely permitted themselves to forego. But on this particular Tuesday the perversity of things in general took hold of their lives. Even before breakfast there came a knock at Martha's door, and Nelly's voice saying, —

"Please, ma'am, Mrs. Ramsay, Sophy says the boiler 's a-leakin' somethin' dreadful, and shall she go on with the breakfast or put out the fire in case it might burst, ma'am?"

Tuesday, moreover, was the day the laundress came!

Bert went off in a bad humor; *why* did she have to wait and see the plumber, he wanted to know? It was purely a case of a new boiler, was n't it? Did she propose to sit down and watch them put it in? Well, then! No, he could not see that she had to wait for the plumber and get the servants started again; he could not

see it at all. He did n't wait for plumbers, did he? He simply gave an order to have a thing done, and it was done; *that* was the proper way to regulate a house!

She followed him to the door — he was such a dear, so seldom in a bad humor! She loved his being disappointed at having to give up their walk together, of course, even though his little outburst of temper did seem rather disproportionate. She stood in the doorway, wistfully watching until he should have turned the corner; and as she waited the rain came from skies that had been leaden for a day, came in that businesslike, steady downpour that meant days of it. As she turned back into the house, Vieva came tripping down the stairs with fluent apologies for being late. Martha was ashamed of the feeling she had that somehow on this particular trying morning Vieva ought to have been on time; already the kitchen fire was out, and the breakfast would be disgustingly cold. But Vieva did not mind; her chief thought, it seemed, was that she had not got down in time to see Cousin Robert. She had promised him— she hoped he had n't been cross. . . .

The plumber came, and gloomily wondered why they had not turned out the fire in the furnace also, since there was a hot-water connection there as well as with the range. But at last the leak in the boiler was stopped, the plumber gone, the furnace fire made again (with the last of the kindling wood, which left the laundress demanding what she should do for a fire in the little laundry stove), and order restored. Martha started upstairs for her hat. On the upper landing she all but stumbled over a dismal, huddled little heap of a child which began to sob audibly as she bent over it. It was long past nine o'clock, and this was Ruth, always so good, so punctual, so cheerful. Martha thought instantly of all the contagious diseases ever heard of, and raised the child, feeling her forehead and her hot little hands.

But the flush on her cheeks was only the flush of weeping. It was test day at school, and Ruth knew she was going to fail, and she had spent so much time over English last night that she had not done her mathematics, and she could n't find her rubbers, anyway, and she was never go-

ing to school any more because she was a disgrace.

Martha considered quickly. "What time is the test to be, darling?"

The time set for the ordeal, it seemed, was half-past nine, and by this time it must be over, and Ruth wished that she was dead, and would mother please put some bay rum on her head?

Mother did, but had to answer the telephone twice before Ruth's sobbing altogether ceased. The matron at the hospital had departed overnight, it seemed, and Martha's presence was needed at once, even before the hour of the meeting. The other message was for Vieva — and Vieva had already gone out — probably, Martha thought, for her daily visit to Uncle Andrew. That was all right, of course; only, if Vieva had been home she might have helped with Ruth. As it was, Martha escorted the child to school, and arranged that the dreaded test should be omitted, and then hastened, by taxi-cab, to the hospital. When she came out it was long past luncheon-time, as she realized with a pang, having meant to be at home when Ruth

got there. She telephoned, and the child's voice sounded cheerful; she and Cecily were to go to dancing-school that afternoon, and might she wear a white dress, because she did so hate middy blouses, and would mother please tell Sophy not to have junket so often, because nobody but Bobby cared for it any more?

Martha looked at the little watch on her wrist as she left the telephone; there was a committee meeting at three — she would have a glass of malted milk, and she would have to choose between an hour at her desk with her faithful Josephine or getting her marketing done. She decided for the marketing, for she made rather a cult of buying in person, and Josephine could be trusted to have everything ready for her and to remind her of whatever was pressing.

The meeting was long — longer than she realized until Ann Brookes left, doubtless remembering the preparations she must make for the evening, and so reminded Martha of the fleeting hours. But Josephine — a determined young person, very tense, very near-sighted, and very, very conscientious — was waiting for

her, and all but pressed her into the office to dictate some letters and to sign some others. There was a very good chance of their getting the penny-lunch plan accepted by the School Board, and infinite data had to be collected and arranged, and tables and other statistics put into brief forms for the perusal of the uninterested Board members. If Mrs. Ramsay did not attend to it, it might be that they would fail, as they had failed before because of lack of telling information, and so on, until Martha waved to Ann, sighed, and settled down to an hour or more of concentrated effort which brought her up almost to seven o'clock.

She had no need of a latch-key this evening; her front door was flung open by Vieva, joyous and lovely in the rosiest and daintiest of evening gowns, a fairy silhouette against the lighted rectangle of the doorway.

"Oh, Cousin Martha, you're so late!" she cried. "I know you must be tired to death, poor dear! Why did you let those horrid people keep you so long and tire you all out? We were afraid you'd be late for the dance! Do let me help you out of your coat!"

There was really no justification for Martha's dim feeling of resentment at Vieva's helping her, and she was half ashamed of turning so quickly away to slip out of her coat unassisted. Then she tried to smile — but she was tired, miserably tired, and Vieva's youthful freshness —

Robert, properly attired in black and white, but with a somewhat gloomy expression, came out of the drawing-room, and stood between the curtains. Of course it was not their way to embrace before any one else; nevertheless, he might at least look cheerful at her coming!

"Hello, Pats! Pretty late, are n't you? Forget we were going to the Brookes's?" said he.

Suddenly, unreasonably, Martha was more conscious than before of the contrast between her own raiment and the freshness of Bert's and Vieva's; they seemed of one world, she of another. But still she tried to smile, to appear unhurried and unconcerned.

"Are n't you gorgeous, you two!" she said. "Are n't you dressed rather early, though? Did you have a good time at the tea, Vieva? And where are the children?"

"Oh, Cousin Martha, I had a wonderful time!" Vieva said; and added, with a sidelong glance at Bert, "Uncle Andrew sent the limousine for me both ways, and Rodney got there late and came home with me. Cousin Robert was home, and — and Rodney did n't stay very long. Cousin Robert thought it was time to dress."

"I see," said Martha. "I won't keep you long. Will you tell them to put on dinner right away, Bert? I won't stop to dress, but I must run up and see to the children —"

"Nonsense," said Bert. "Have your dinner first. You look all tuckered out, Pats, — what's the matter?" And as Martha paused at the foot of the stairway and looked up, he added, "The children are in bed and asleep long ago."

"Heaven, is it as late as that?" Martha murmured.

But a voice came down from the hall above, a voice with a glad chirp in it, as though it were announcing a fact which must give joy to them all. It was Cecily's.

"*I'm* not asleep, daddy!" it said.

"Cecily! What are you doing there?" This from Robert to a small, white-clad figure which had now come to the top of the stairs.

"I waited up to say good-night to my mother," said Cecily, with a fine assumption of virtue that almost succeeded in being deceiving.

"Cecily!" Robert began; Vieva laughed, and Martha's look went to Bert's face — helpless, tired, appealing.

But Cecily's voice went on, honey-sweet. "I wanted my mother to hear me say my prayers!"

There was a moment's silence below. Cecily's small, white form came a step or two farther down. Martha felt a lump in her throat, felt a great yearning toward the child, so naughty, so beguiling. She started up, but Robert, with a quick step forward, put a detaining arm about her.

"Cecily," he commanded, "go to your bed immediately!"

And Cecily's dim form vanished with an abruptness which might have been comical, except that the moment held something more than humor for her parents. Martha leaned

against that dear arm, and Bert drew her more closely to him. They had forgotten Vieva's bright presence, forgotten Martha's lateness, forgotten the dance and all else for the moment except that they were parents; the problem of each was the problem of both, and they were one.

It was not until they were seated about the warm glow of the dinner-table with comforting hot soup before them that Martha noticed that Vieva was still demurely smiling.

"Cousin Robert," said she, "when you told Cecily to go to bed you looked just the way you did this afternoon when you told Rodney Brookes to go home!"

Martha gasped. "Oh, Bert, you never did!" she protested.

"Of course I did n't," Robert began.

And Vieva added, laughing, "Oh, but, Cousin Robert, it was just the same thing as telling him to go home, when you said it was so horribly late!"

That began a merry war of words between the two, and Martha was glad of their chatter: she need not talk, and she was becoming more and

more conscious of fatigue every moment. Her thoughts wandered, dull and not to be concentrated, upon the affairs of the crowded day —the hospital; the wee little disagreement between some of the women on the Suffrage Committee; a forgotten detail which she had meant to warn Josephine about and a letter which she had meant to answer that day and had not thought of until now. Then her thoughts came back to Cecily; to Bert's dearness as he had held her to his side; to his newly discovered efficiency in being able to find his evening things unassisted — even to wonder how he managed about his white cravats, which had been her own affair for years.

The first thing to bring her back to a consciousness of the immediate present was the silence of Bert and Vieva; they were watching her, and as she looked up questioningly Vieva gave a little laugh.

"Oh, Cousin Martha, Cousin Robert has asked you the same question four times!" she cried.

Martha looked from Vieva to Bert.

"It does n't matter, old girl," said he. "I

only asked if you were still tired. I'm afraid you are."

She looked at him — tried to answer — he was afraid she was tired! His eyes were troubled.

"You don't think you've caught cold, do you?" he was asking. She shook her head. "I don't like your looking so all in, Pats! Why don't you stay home this evening and get to bed early?"

"Oh, would you mind going without me?" she cried. "I could n't stay away if it were any house but Ann Brookes's; but she'll understand. You're sure you won't mind?"

"We'll miss you," said Bert, "but I think you'd better stay home. I'll take good care of Vieva!"

Before nine o'clock they were off, for when Ann said come early it meant truly early; Ann was a believer in beauty-sleep. Martha sank into the big chair that Bert pushed up for her, and raised her face to his.

"Sure you're all right, Pats?" he asked, as he bent down to kiss her. "Get to bed early, won't you?" He paused in the doorway to look

back. "Would n't you like me to stay home with you?" he asked. "Vieva can go to Ann's alone, you know!"

"Of course not," Martha said, waving him a kiss. "Run along and have a good time. I'm going to bed in five minutes!"

Why had n't she suspected, before Vieva came, that Bert would still enjoy going out, still like to dance? She heard them depart, laughing, chatting; their voices seemed to come to her on long, slow waves of sound, like the murmur of a distant, summer sea. . . . She must get to bed . . . when she could get up the courage to move . . . presently when she had rested a minute or two.

Nelly came downstairs. . . . Martha wondered why she came down the front stairs. . . . But surely there was something of urgency in her manner.

"Oh, Mrs. Ramsay, ma'am, it's Bobby! I'm afraid Bobby has the croup, ma'am!"

Instantly Martha was standing, alert. "Where is Hedwig?" she asked. Hedwig was far more capable than herself in an emergency, and Martha had relied on her since Cecily was a baby.

"Sure and it's Hedwig's day out, Mrs. Ramsay, ma'am, and it was yerself told her she might stay at her sister's the night!"

"Oh, yes," said Martha, from halfway up the stairs. "Bring me the alcohol, will you, Nelly?"

Martha knew well the procedure of Bobby's attacks of croup. When everything was ready for the battle and the croup kettle had begun its work, she sent Nelly to bed. Bobs cried for the absent Hedwig, at first; but Martha began the absorbing tale of the little small red hen — the steaming croup kettle serving to illustrate that glorious episode of the exit of Mr. Fox — and Bobs forgot Hedwig in his demands for more.

It proved to be so mild an attack as scarcely to deserve the name of croup, but it was after midnight when Martha heard the dancers returning, as she was passing through the upper hall on the way to the alcohol supply in the bathroom. She bent over the banister; she meant to call down a greeting to them, and what restrained her she could not tell.

Vieva was standing with one foot on the

lowest stair, as alert and vivid as a butterfly, and far more charming, in her rosy gown, with her flushed cheeks, her pale gold hair ever so slightly disarranged. Bert had just hung up his overcoat, and was coming toward her; he, too, looked flushed. . . . They were speaking in the tones people unconsciously use when they come into a sleeping house; Martha did not catch Vieva's words, but Bert's familiar voice reached her.

"Why not? I've kissed your mother ever since we were kiddies! Why not?"

Martha disappeared into the bathroom, from whence she heard Vieva's swift rush upstairs, and Bert's laugh.

Martha's hand was shaking, absurdly, as she poured the alcohol into the lamp of the croup kettle. It was all right — of course, it was perfectly all right! There was absolutely no reason in the world why Bert should not kiss his cousin's young daughter good-night! There was no reason in the world why Vieva should not kiss an elderly cousin — for his portly thirty-eight must surely place him in that category, to Vieva's budding twenty. It was perfectly all

right. It was only that things do become so distorted when you are so deadly tired. . . . It was perfectly all . . .

Bert opened the door of Bobby's nursery, whither Martha had returned after filling the lamp.

"What's up?" he asked; then, seeing the steaming kettle, he came into the room. "Oh, I say, Pats," he said, his voice full of solicitude, after a swift glance at the now sleeping Bobs. "You have n't been going through this song and dance all by yourself, have you? Why, you poor old girl — and you were so tired, too!"

Suddenly Martha's eyes felt hot and stinging, but she made a wild mental grab at her tottering self-control, and managed to pat Bert's cheek as he put his arm about her. It was perfectly all right — and it was one of her principles to be a good sport.

"Don't you worry about me!" she said. "It's all in the day's work!"

"Not much it is n't!" her husband contradicted. "Why could n't that youngster postpone his little party until a more appropriate

time, I'd like to know? It's not conduct becoming a gentleman!"

"Oh, they never do, you know! They always choose the worst time possible. But it's over now. He'll sleep — and so shall I! I'll stay in here, though, so you run along!"

"You're sure it's all right? Why not let me stay with Bobs? Well — good-night, then!"

She kissed him. He did not see that as she turned away her face flushed deeply — but it would have told him nothing if he had seen. She lighted the night-light, turned off the shaded electric, and curled up on the couch; but for a long time sleep would not come to her.

Of course she did have to stay there with Bobs; but — she was glad that she had to stay!

Over and over she seemed to be hearing Bert's voice as it came up to her from the hall, and his words, and Vieva's rustling skirts as she sped upstairs, and Bert's laugh . . .

It takes but a little thing to jar us into a consciousness of larger things, or into a supersensitiveness where we suspect much that might have remained forever hidden.

VIII

It was morning, and Bobs was standing beside the couch, fully dressed, as well as though croup had never made its baneful appearance in a troubled world, the terrors of the night all forgotten, bubbling with glee as he tried to outline his mother's eyelashes with a small forefinger. Naturally her eyes opened. She smiled at him, and Bobby proceeded to climb upon her and seat himself astride.

"Now I'll take a ride," said he. "I'm going to have a hundred ponies when I get to be a man."

Martha laughed, and drew him down to a swift embrace — all embraces of Bobs being necessarily fleeting. He squirmed down, and made toward the door.

"I don't want to be hugged. I want my bekist," said he, with masculine frankness.

Martha looked at the clock. It marked but five minutes before the breakfast hour, yet she lay there, thinking, living over again that mo-

ment when Bert and Vieva had paused at the foot of the stairs — a moment which prolonged itself in her memory until it seemed like an hour. She mentally struggled through that memory as one does through a nightmare, knowing all the while that it is unreal, yet held by its horrors, suffering from them, vainly trying to escape them. Then she managed to shake off the thought of it all, to bring herself back to the sanity of the morning.

The sunlight was streaming across the nursery floor — Bobby was quite well again — she had been too tired the night before to see things in their right perspective. She was glad she *had* kissed Bert good-night; she was just a wee bit ashamed of not having let him sleep on the couch here in her place — or, of course, she could have left the door open between their room and the nursery, as she had many times before, and always when Hedwig was away. Her cheeks were burning; she jumped up and went into her dressing-room. Evidently Bert had gone down, and Martha realized that he must have dressed very quietly, doubtless for fear of disturbing her.

How good the cool water felt! She scrambled into her tailored skirt and the blouse she had worn the day before; it was not absolutely fresh, but she told herself that she would have her coat on all day, and it was too late to get out another. She was fastening the leather strap of her business-like watch-bracelet as she went down the stairs; it eluded her, and she paused just outside the dining-room door to get it adjusted.

Vieva was seated behind the percolator, and at the moment was pouring Bert's second cup of coffee, and saying something about using her fingers for the sugar which Martha seemed to have heard before, far in the dim past. The words brought back, in one of those curious flashes of memory, a moment in the dining-room of a huge hotel beside the sea, where she and Bert had stopped for part of their honeymoon, — a moment when she, Martha, was saying those same silly words about fingers and sugar, and Bert was smiling quizzically at her.

She walked into her own dining-room, now, and she did not look at Bert: if she had caught

on his face the least reflection of that earlier look . . .

Vieva jumped up, serene and smiling and sweet as a rose with the dew on it, and held out the chair for Cousin Martha — a little attention which suddenly made Martha aware of all her years.

"Oh, Cousin Martha! I'm so *sorry* you had such a horrid time last night! And you were so dreadfully tired, too! Cousin Robert hoped you were going to stay in bed this morning."

Of course she smiled at Vieva; she even patted her hand and then gave it a warm little clasp. Not often before had she offered the girl such endearment; but out of the depths of her self-reproach — and her disgust at that persistent stirring at her heart — she would have done more.

"Thank you for taking care of Cousin Robert, my dear!" she said, as Vieva went to her own place at the table.

"Now, Pats, you're not going out this morning," Bert was saying. "You're to stay home and take a nap, or do some knitting, or some-

thing. You can't wear yourself out this way, you know!"

Martha leaned back, looked at him, and laughed. She — she — to take a nap or do some knitting by way of resting! Where under Heaven had Bert got such an idea, or resurrected it? When had he ever known her to take a nap, and — truly, how could she not laugh and wonder? — when had he ever seen her, his Martha, knit? Did men never learn, did they never progress in their ideas, must they forever cling to primitive ideals for their women-folk, ideals surely conceived by some earlier generation? Did he really suppose, at this late day, that all women knitted? Vieva, now, had sometimes in evidence a pretty bag from which big soft balls of yarn had a way of rolling and having to be picked up — although the article she was knitting did not seem to make very much progress; and Bert's sister Essie had made enough very large gray socks to last an entire regiment throughout a winter. . . . But herself, Martha!

Bert had risen, and was stuffing his folded newspaper into the side pocket of his coat; it was a habit which Martha had long protested

against, and quite vainly. Now he came around to her chair and bent down to kiss her; evidently he counted Vieva as one of the family, and no longer a stranger before whom one must retain certain small reserves.

"Now, you get good and rested, Pats," said he. "Coming, Vieva?"

Vieva jumped up. "Will you excuse me, Cousin Martha?" she asked, without waiting for Martha's reply. "I thought I'd walk downtown with Cousin Robert this morning — it's so perfectly heavenly after the rain!"

Now, there was absolutely no reason in the world why the girl should not walk with Robert; Martha kept reminding herself of that while she finished breakfast, while she started Ruth and Cecily off to school and listened to Hedwig's voluble regret over her absence of the night before when Bobby was sick; and she kept telling herself the same thing in every interval of the day — for it persisted in coming into her consciousness and having to be dealt with, to her secret shame. Would Bert, had the situation been reversed, have felt any least annoyance? Would he not have been simply and sincerely

glad for her to have companionship on a day when he could not be with her? Of course he would! That is, of course he ought to! And yet — she was becoming cattish! It was too absurd, too disgusting of her! What was she, that she should permit herself to be capable of such unworthy feelings, anyway?

Even during a suffrage meeting in the afternoon she had forcibly to put the unworthy thoughts out of her mind. Here were all these splendid women unselfishly giving themselves, their time, and so much of their strength and effort to work that, even if it should be crowned with success, could after all mean so little to their own lives in comparison with the enormous effect it would have upon the lives of their less fortunate sisters. Would they, would any one of these other women for one moment entertain thoughts as mean and catty as hers, Martha Ramsay's? She was lost in disgust of herself, and only the chairman's voice speaking directly to her brought her back into the immediate present.

"Will you go to the Capital with the committee on Monday, Mrs. Ramsay?"

There was no time for her thoughts to formulate themselves, yet she answered unhesitatingly, and only afterwards realized that her acceptance was really an impulse generously to make amends to herself, if not to the all-unconscious Robert and Vieva, for her feeling of the morning and of the night before; of course she would go; she would prove to herself that she trusted them! Only later did she realize that at another time she would probably have refused on the ground of having a young guest to look after.

Her usual buoyancy of spirit returned. The chairman was selecting the rest of the committee — women who could talk well, women whose presence and bearing would be apt to make their own impression. Ann Brookes was one, Mrs. Purviance another, and Kate Wendell made up the list; Martha could not help feeling conscious of a little thrill of satisfaction at being numbered among them, for they were women of distinction and character, and she was the youngest, although Time himself could not have told Kate Wendell's age.

Ann Brookes and Kate went with her into

the little office where the faithful Josephine reigned — the office really set aside for the business of the club's penny school-lunch committee, but from which it was impossible to exclude the many women who wanted to see Martha about one thing or another, or who dropped in to meet somebody else or to ask whether Josephine had seen somebody else or if somebody else had telephoned. It was a comfortable room, business-like but quite feminine; Martha had been permitted to furnish it as she liked, and Martha was sufficiently of her time frankly to love things feminine — and sufficiently of her time, be it said, not to pride herself on loving them! So the other women who knew her well enough, or who wanted to know her well enough, had a way of dropping in. Sometimes they had tea sent up from the club's dining-room; sometimes they were interested enough in their talk to forget that tea existed.

This afternoon the talk was, at the last, of what clothes they should wear to the Capital. After the others left, Martha sat thoughtful for a while, tapping her lips with an ivory letter-opener. Josephine, who always believed herself

to be both tactful and sympathetic, waited for a moment, notebook in hand and pencil poised. Then she remarked: —

"Clothes are such a burden, are they not, Mrs. Ramsay? How delightful it would be if women might wear a uniform!"

Martha returned to the present, tilted her chair backwards, and looked quizzically at Josephine's intense face. "A uniform? Heaven forbid!" she exclaimed. "Clothes, my dear Josephine, are no small part of our rights and privileges! Don't you want both?"

Josephine looked doubtful. "Oh, of course I want my rights, Mrs. Ramsay! Of course —"

"Of course you do! Don't be a goose, Josephine! The very way you draw the hair back from your temples in that severe fashion proves that you only do it because you can't have everything you want and so you won't take what you *can* have!"

Josephine gasped. She adored Martha, and really did not care what she said to her; but to follow when Martha was winging on one of her wild flights of fancy — and of absurdity —

"Oh, Mrs. Ramsay!"

Martha laughed. "There, Josephine, don't look horrified! I don't mean more than half of it, you know! Now let's see—which list shall we go over first?"

Then, as she took the paper the devoted secretary handed her, she remarked, thoughtfully, "I suppose Mrs. Purviance will wear her mauve velvet—"

In the interval before her departure for the Capital Martha was serenely, buoyantly happy. Bert grumbled at the idea of her going, even though it was to be only for three or four days; and Vieva turned upon her a wide-eyed look which made Martha wonder a little — and then check herself with quick self-reproach — how she had ever thought that babyish expression appealing.

"Oh, Cousin Martha, do you really go right up to those men and talk to them about votes for women?" Vieva asked. "Are n't you afraid of them?"

And when they were alone Bert said to her, as he prowled about their bedroom, "See here, Pats, it's all right for you to go gallivanting off with a lot of women having a good time; but

what in thunder am I going to do with Vieva while you're gone?"

Martha's heart gave a leap. What was he going to do with Vieva! Now, would any man on earth have asked such a footless question about a girl if he — if he — Of course not! She answered calmly, in a voice just *distrait* enough to make it sound as though the question were scarcely worth answering at all: —

"Do with Vieva? Why, nothing, honey! What do you do with Vieva now, you big baby?"

And, indeed, Vieva amused herself very well, as Martha discovered on the day of her return. When she reached her own house, it was at that hour of the afternoon when Bobby would be having his supper in the nursery; the idea came to her of stealing silently into the house and up the stairs, to stand in the doorway and catch the first adorable look of surprise on his face, and then his swift rush to her arms. But she had scarcely closed the front door noiselessly behind her when she was aware of something on the landing of the stairs. She looked up; her daughter Cecily was lying there — if such a

position could be designated by a word which suggests an attitude of repose. Her head seemed to be pillowed on the floor; her curls were tumbling through the banisters; one slippered foot was waving in the air, the other was apparently doubled under her in some odd way. Martha stopped, looking upward, amazed, but only for a moment speechless.

"Cecily! What on earth are you doing that for? Why are you lying on the stairs?"

Cecily, with a rotary movement, sat up, bent a reproachful downward look upon her mother, laid a forefinger upon her lips, then beckoned violently and arose. She tiptoed upstairs with an ostentatious carefulness and noiselessness. Martha followed.

In the middle of Martha's bedroom Cecily stood, still with her finger on her lips.

"Cecily! What are you doing that for?" Martha again demanded.

"Vieva's got a new beau!" said Cecily's whisper. It was a very loud whisper, meant to reach her mother, halfway across the room.

"You must not say 'got' — and where *did* you hear such a word as 'beau'? And —"

Martha stopped, all too conscious that her corrections were not bettering the situation, and that she was not saying what she meant to say at all.

"Nelly's cousin used to have one — that's how I know about 'em. He lived in Hoboken. She loved him a awful lot, but now she does n't, because what's the use, she says, when he's gone and married another girl — and *her* father rich, owning a pool parlor and all. What's a pool parlor, mother? Do you go swimming in it?"

Martha sat down. Suddenly the closeness of her furs — or was it something else? — was stifling her. "Cecily," she said, "are n't you glad to see mother?"

Cecily's smile was adorable. "Of course I am," she affirmed. "But I do wish you had n't come quite so soon, mother! I did so want to see Vieva's beau pose!"

For a moment Martha could only look at her child; then instinctively she made a mental grab for the familiar reality of every day, of a situation that she at least had met before.

"Cecily," she said, "will you please go down-

stairs and ask Nelly to bring me a cup of tea — quite strong, with cream, and some bread and butter? Then come up to me again, directly, without stopping anywhere or talking to any one else."

Cecily had come to her side and wound her arms about her mother's neck, her welcome as warm as it was belated. "Oh, may I wait and bring it up to you myself?" she pleaded, all a sweet desire to be helpful and attentive.

"No. Come directly up to me again," said her mother, and awaited Cecily's return with what courage she could.

"Now, Cecily," she asked, when Cecily had come back, smiling, calm — the model of a well-behaved child who has just performed an errand for her mother! — "will you tell me why you were lying on the stairs when I came in?"

Cecily sat down, fluffing out her short skirts at the sides and crossing her hands and her feet as she did at dancing-school during the intermissions — some of them.

"Well, to tell you the truth," she said, "I was waiting to see whether Vieva's beau was going to pose!"

Martha could only look at her daughter, and Cecily was looking back at her, serenely, apparently rather pleased with herself. Apparently, too, her idea interested her so much that she was willing to enlarge upon it without further urging.

"When Betty Purviance posed in pictures at the Woman's Club last year she had on that great big hat and that perfectly 'normous muff — *you* know, and she just sat still and did n't do a thing! And when Nelly's cousin's beau posed he was sitting on the sofa with her real close up, and when he posed Nelly's cousin fell on his neck and he kissed her. And I wanted to see what Vieva's beau was going to do when *he* posed!"

Martha was beginning to understand, but for the life of her she did not know what to say, where to begin.

"Daddy sits on the sofa with Vieva a lot. Sometimes he holds her hand. But he does n't pose. It's only beaus that pose when they're sitting on the sofa. I asked Nelly's cousin. That's how I knew Vieva's was going to. That's why I was lying on the stairs — you can see

over the top of the portière right to the sofa in the living-room, and Vieva and *him* were on the sofa and I wanted —"

Was it only the child's lapse from propriety which gave that sharp edge to Martha's voice?

"Cecily! Do you mean that you were listening and peeping?"

Cecily's expression became one of gentle reproof, of outraged virtue. "It is n't peeping when it's through a door, mother! Of course I would n't listen to what *grown* people were saying, not for anything, no matter *how* much I wanted to hear, I would n't! You see, this was only Vieva!"

"Cousin Vieva — not Vieva. And Cousin Vieva is grown-up, surely!" said Martha, and even as she said it she realized that she was dodging the real issue.

"She is n't really quite fully completely grown-up, mother," said Cecily. "She told us we could call her Vieva — she said herself she was n't grown-up enough to have us call her Cousin Vieva! So there you are!" she added, with an outward gesture of the hands which

seemed to imply that it was really no affair of hers, after all.

Martha knew that she must somehow not only solve the intricacies of this amazing code of her daughter's, hitherto so unsuspected, but must also set it to rights.

"Cecily, come here," she said; and when the child was standing in front of her she took both the small hands in her own. "Cecily, you were watching and listening to Vieva and — and some one else, from the landing on the stairs, without their knowing it — were you not?"

"Well — I was watching *him*, mostly! I said I was n't listening, mother — though of course I *could* hear just a little. It was n't very inkeresting. I do wish you had n't come *quite* so soon, mother!"

Many times thereafter Martha wondered what the outcome of that conversation would have been had she and Cecily pursued it to a logical conclusion. Sometimes she was vaguely thankful that it ended as it did, since in all probability Cecily would have had the best of it; sometimes she tried to comfort herself with the thought that many a childish iniquity rights

itself and is outgrown and forgotten. At other times she felt, with uneasy stirrings of conscience, that somehow she should have trained her daughter so that the whole thing would have been impossible, only to remind herself that no human parent could possibly have foreseen that situation and have prepared for it. But the conversation ended by Vieva herself running upstairs and into the room ahead of Nelly with the tea. Vieva was flushed, a little breathless, and extraordinarily pretty.

"Oh, Cousin Martha! I did not know you were home, until Nelly asked whether I would have tea downstairs or up here with you! I am so *glad* you're home! Oh, we *have* missed you!"

Truly, the girl was sweet! Martha had a sudden pang as the thought came to her of how Genevieve must adore her, how hard she must find the doing without her!

"I'm glad you have, dear! But not *too* much, have you? You've had a good time, have n't you — ?"

Nelly, beaming, had brought up a low table for the tea-tray, and Martha was busying herself with the cups. Vieva had taken a place be-

side her on the couch, cozily and affectionately, and Cecily was lingering near, with eyes on the plate of cookies.

"Oh, yes, Cousin Martha — I've had a wonderful time! But —"

Vieva paused, and Martha looked up, smiling, as she handed her a cup.

"But, Vieva?"

The girl was blushing a little. "Yes—there is a 'but,' Cousin Martha! I want to tell you about it, after a while."

"I see," said Martha; and by way of helping her past her little embarrassment, asked, "What did you do with — whoever it was? There *was* some one downstairs with you when I came, was n't there?"

Vieva nodded. "Mr. Martin — yes. I'm afraid he must have seen that I wanted dreadfully to come up with you, Cousin Martha. So — he went away!"

"Oh, what a way to treat the poor young man! Don't you like him, Vieva?"

"Oh, yes, Cousin Martha — I — I like him. That is, I think I like him! But —"

"But what?" Martha was about equally in-

"I'M SURE HE'S EVER SO NICE, COUSIN MARTHA"

terested in her tea and in Vieva's shy little reluctance to talk about Aunt Helen's protégé.

"Oh — well, he's nice; I'm sure he's ever so nice, Cousin Martha! But — well, you know I think — I think he poses, rather!"

"O-o-o-h!" There was a sudden wail from Cecily.

"O-o-o-oh! Now! You see what you did by coming back so soon, mother! He did! He did, and I did n't see it!"

With which cryptic utterance, with tear-brimming eyes and quivering lips, and a reproachful look at her mother, Cecily dashed out of the room.

IX

"WELL," Martha said, when their laughter over Cecily's sudden exit had subsided, "tell me about it, Vieva!"

Vieva's shell-like cheeks flushed, and she looked off at the deepening dusk outside the window. "Oh, Cousin Martha," she said, "I'm afraid I've — I've — displeased — Aunt Helen!"

Martha looked at the pretty face; she had the faintest of faint suspicions that Vieva was not quite so innocent as she seemed; but — it being now a question of Helen — she laughed.

Vieva turned.

"*I* don't laugh about it, Cousin Martha!" she said, dimpling nevertheless. "I'm afraid it is very — serious! That is, serious for me, and — maybe — for poor Uncle Andrew."

Again Martha laughed. "Heavens, Vieva, you're not making your Aunt Helen jealous, are you?" she cried.

Vieva glanced up at her, then away again.

"Oh, Cousin Martha!" she said, in demure protest which admitted more than it denied. "I'm sure I can't help being nice to Uncle Andrew — he's been such a duck to me, ever since the very first time I met him. I — I feel sorry for Uncle Andrew — I really and truly do. *You* know how it is, Cousin Martha, — you never really enjoy things you are only *allowed* to do; and Uncle Andrew says it's been years and years since he has — has had his own way about anything. Why, Cousin Martha, Aunt Helen even picks out the kind of cigars that poor old man smokes, and even then he is only allowed one a day, after luncheon! And now . . ."

"And now Aunt Helen is sulking because the old man has taken a fancy to you — is that it?"

"It is worse than that," said Vieva. "She is n't exactly — sulking! It began the day Uncle Andrew sent the limousine for me to go to the luncheon and then again to bring me home from the tea — just a few days before you went away, Cousin Martha. Aunt Helen happened to want the limousine — and it had gone after me, and —"

Vieva's voice trailed off in a way that was more expressive than words. Martha was enjoying the recital.

"And then — well, I think perhaps Uncle Andrew forgot to mention to Aunt Helen about the lovely ring he gave me, and Aunt Helen found out about it; and when she found I had the limousine when she wanted it, and then discovered that Uncle Andrew had given me the ring, she said something to Uncle Andrew that must have provoked him. He telephoned for me that morning early — it was the morning before Bobby had the croup — and he took me downtown, and he bought another car — a perfectly lovely runabout. And — and it is entirely for me, whenever I want to use it! Not for anybody else at all — I only have to telephone for it, or run up to his garage . . ."

"Vieva!" cried Martha. This was, indeed, an amazing thing!

"And — and now *everybody* is cross, Cousin Martha! Rodney Brookes says that *no man* ought to be allowed to give me a car, and he will not believe it when I tell him it is just for me to *use*, that it is n't really my *own!* And

Cousin Robert says Uncle Andrew is — is an old — old — And Aunt Helen did n't speak to me this morning, and got up and left the room when I arrived; and poor dear Uncle Andrew held my hand and almost *wept* when I said I thought I'd better not use the new car, and he says it's his last hope of — of 'getting ahead of Helen,' and it's been years since he has, and . . ."

Vieva's voice trailed off, and she looked as unhappy and miserable as it was in her to look. And, truly, it did seem rather a hopeless muddle! It reminded Martha of her children's nursery rhyme, of the cat that began to catch the rat, whereupon the rat began to gnaw the rope, the rope began — and so on everlastingly!

"But you don't know how to run a car, Vieva! What good will a runabout do you if you don't know how to drive it?" Apparently the ethics of the situation interested Martha less than its practical side.

Vieva turned her head and gave Martha a fleeting glance which told more than her words. "Oh, Mr. Martin is teaching me to drive it,"

said she. "And now Aunt Helen has an idea that Mr. Martin — Mr. Martin is — is —"

Martha laughed aloud. "And now Helen thinks her poet is falling in love with you, too! Is that it?"

Really, Vieva was very pretty when she was miserable!

"Well — anyway, that's what she said this morning! But she was really dreadfully cross — oh, dreadfully, Cousin Martha! You see, Uncle Andrew — oh, he's ever and ever so much nicer to me than I deserve, I know! Aunt Helen says — oh, she was very, *very* cross!"

Martha wondered how she would feel if Vieva were saying those silly little words about herself! What if *she* were the one who had been very, very cross, what if *she* had behaved like an idiot, as Helen evidently had? As if any woman need be afraid to trust her own husband with a child like this, even though it were a matter of — of kisses or anything else!

Well, it was beyond her, as Martha told herself; for after she had gone back to the nursery to see Bobs, and warned Ruth that she must *not* study in the afternoons instead of going out,

and tripped downstairs to say a word to Sophy, and was again in her own room, resting and waiting for Bert, she thought it all over again — Vieva's confession and what it implied. As far as she could make out, Helen had become too jealous to remain sensible, and old Andrew — who would have suspected him of being such an old sport, of having such pluck? — had put Helen in her place by the purchase of the new automobile — far more costly, surely, than the ring; and Rodney Brookes had become jealous of Andrew, or of the car, or of young Martin. As far as Martha could make out, the only person who was pleased was Thomas Aquinas, the instructor! It was rather a snap for Thomas! Well, it all worked back to Helen! To think of Helen's being jealous of her own husband! Or, if not jealous, to think of her objecting to a man of Andrew's age doing anything whatever — yes, anything whatever — for a child like Vieva!

She was still pondering this when Bert came in. He was enormously glad to see her, and full of reproaches because she had not telegraphed the hour of her arrival; and then he wanted to

talk over some business which had cropped up since she was away (he said it reproachfully, as though she had been gone a month); and then there was dinner and a really jolly evening at home all together — jolly in spite of Vieva's slight abstraction and the way she jumped whenever the telephone jingled; and it was not until they were once more in their own room together that Martha's thoughts turned in the slightest toward the miserable channels of the week before.

Bert had a way of emptying his pockets every night, of putting their contents down anywhere, upon any convenient surface that offered. To-night, as he talked, he laid something on Martha's dressing-table; and when she seated herself to brush her hair she saw it — a little oval, gray velvet box.

During the first year or so after his comfortable salary made such a thing possible, Bert had more than once surprised her with some gift of jewelry — not because of anniversaries or birthdays, but merely because he had the impulse to buy her something; it had been a long while now since he had done such a thing — and,

indeed, in the dear sureness of their companionship, Martha had not missed it. But remembering other times when he had prepared a surprise for her, she took up the little gray box and opened it. Within, on its satin cushion, lay a bracelet of delicate gold threads interwoven with small sapphires. It was an exquisite thing, and rather costly, moreover. She turned toward him.

"Bert!"

He came and stood behind her, bending down to look over her shoulder at the opened box. "Do you like it?" he asked. "It's the little girl's birthday to-morrow — Vieva's — I didn't suppose you knew, or would remember."

For an instant her heart seemed to stand still; then it surely, certainly leaped, and went fluttering away as foolishly as only a woman's silly heart can.

"Rather neat, don't you think?" Bert was saying, in a very complacent voice. He was absolutely taking it for granted that she would praise his thoughtfulness; Martha gripped hard to that fact as she answered, and she was glad, *glad* that somehow, mercifully, she man-

aged to control her voice so that it did not tremble.

"It's perfectly lovely," she said, "and just the very thing for Vieva! I'm so glad you thought of it!"

"I rather liked it myself," said he, still in that satisfied tone, and — oh, she acknowledged it to herself even in that moment, as one acknowledges the flash of a lighthouse on a foggy night — he was absolutely without the least little suspicion in the world of what was in her mind and her heart. He even added, as an afterthought, "I say, Pats, how'd you like one like it for yourself?"

And Martha managed to answer, still in a tone which sounded to his ears like most of her tones, — cordial, happy, light, — "I'd love it, some time! Only my stones are not blue, you know! Don't forget that when you go to buy it!"

What if she lay long awake that night, with clenched hands, fighting the thoughts of which she was ashamed and which persisted in taunting her! She had not shown what she felt, nor by one least fraction of a degree shaken Bert's

serenity. Some latent instinct, hitherto unsuspected, born perhaps of long generations of enduring women, doubtless conceived when Eve saw Lilith's young beauty reflected in Adam's eyes — some blessed, sleeping instinct awoke in her in time to keep her from doing or saying the thing which might have aroused Bert from his unconsciousness of anything unusual in the situation, anything at which he might take umbrage. For deeply though she was disgusted at this feeling which she could not quite bring herself to acknowledge as jealousy, and which was, indeed, rather an uneasiness, a fear, a foreboding — even more deeply rooted in her consciousness was her conviction that Bert was still the simple, devoted, boyish old darling that he had always been, and as innocent of blame as of any thought of disloyalty. Nor could she attribute any intention of appeal to Vieva; beyond the shadow of a doubt Vieva thought of Cousin Robert as a very nice, very kind, very friendly, middle-aged person whom one would of course find convenient and to whom one would of course be as charming as one could. And if Vieva was the least little bit in the world more

charming to "Cousin Robert" than to "Cousin Martha," her being so was as innocent of all self-consciousness and intention as if she were a baby girl in a nurse's arms, holding out her own little arms to some nice, strong, smiling man-person, and coyly smiling at him in return. All this Martha knew, and told herself over and over; and yet she lay awake the greater part of the night; because, say to herself what she would, there it *was*, all of it, and — she did not want it to be that way! She ought not to be giving it a second thought: and she thought of it so much that it hurt! She was no better than Helen!

X

The immediate result of their visit to the Legislature was a great rush of work for the women on the Suffrage Committee. The winter had worn on to that point at which its pace was accelerated in everything. Lent was early that year, and entertaining was crowding upon itself as the season drew to a close; in the Woman's Club affairs were coming to their climax in the annual Founders' Day luncheon only a week or two off; it was already time to begin to plan for the spring primaries, and the women of the Civic Club were determined to influence the elections so that a new Board of Health should be installed. On the other hand, it was felt that the present School Board, if properly handled, might be induced to permit the experiment of penny lunches in the schools, where they were particularly needed in the city's districts which were near the mills. The penny lunches were Martha Ramsay's pet scheme and the one to which her most earnest efforts were given; for

several years she had been the head of the household economics department of the Civic Club, and the penny-lunch committee was the outgrowth, the youngest child, of that. Besides this, however, there were multitudinous other things all clamoring to be heard or pressing to be attended to, so that for a while she was — mercifully, she thought, when she had time to think at all — too busy with what was really worth while to permit her mind to be taken up with whimsies.

For it could be no more than a whimsy, a mere figment of a tired mind and an imagination which had forgotten its sense of proportion and of humor, that Robert Ramsay should have — she hated to put it into words, even! — too strong an interest in his cousin's young daughter and their guest. As if Bert *could!*

No, Martha assured herself, there was not, there could not be, anything the least particle too fervent in her Robert's feeling for Vieva; and if Vieva *was* an outrageous little flirt, what earthly harm could there be in her flirting with good, substantial, honest old Bert? Do him good — and it could n't possibly hurt Vieva,

nor Martha, nor any one else in the world. She, Martha, had too much to think about these days, to dwell upon any such nonsense as that! In the brisk hours of her working days she was intensely ashamed of ever having had such a suspicion for a moment.

And brisk, indeed, the days were, and crowded to their limit. As Mrs. Brookes expressed it one sparkling morning when they were walking down the sunny side of the street together, the rush "had" them.

"It's the modern octopus," said she. "Tentacles everywhere, drawing us in. How is one to escape?"

Martha smiled. "Have you ever gone swimming in any of those little tidewaters that run off the Chesapeake, Nance? Then you don't know what it is to strike a school or swarm — or whatever is the proper nautical name of it — of sea-nettles, do you? They are beautiful things — little domes of translucency, with trailing white fringes — water-comets. You may be comfortably swimming along, and suddenly feel a sting, a sort of scalding burn — on your arms or neck — and the nettles are all

around you, and they fairly scorch you wherever they touch. There's only one thing to do — keep on swimming until you swim out of them!"

Ann Brookes laughed and nodded. "I'm not sure one could ever swim out of 'things,'" she said. "They swim with us — a little ahead of us, sometimes! I find myself being more and more taken up with them, and I'm sure you must, too. We both have the affairs of the clubs at heart; we both give more than a thought now and then to suffrage; you have your penny-lunch job, I have my friends the waist-makers and their interests and affairs to keep in mind; and I have the employment bureau of the Church — I'm that old-fashioned that I always occupy my pew at least once a week!"

"Well, I'm sure I do too — or almost! You need n't take credit to yourself for that!"

Ann flashed a smiling look at her. "And yet, you see, we no longer take it for granted! But — beside all that, we both have the hospital board, and new matrons to contend with now and again. You know, Martha, I could have

choked that last woman, and I'd like to have spanked some of the nurses and shut up a doctor or two in a dark cupboard! Well, and I am on eight committees and you are on Heaven knows how many. And we don't make too many mistakes in our check-books, and we run our houses fairly well, don't you think?"

"Oh, our houses, yes! But — I have children! Sometimes I wonder —"

"Your children are cherubs, and very well-brought-up cherubs, too. Mine are grown — and *that*, let me tell you, is a good deal worse than having them just darling kiddies like yours, with all their problems perfectly elemental ones."

Elemental! Martha thought of Cecily and gave a quick little laugh, aloud; but Ann was too much interested in what she was saying not to keep on.

"Now, my children — there's Grace and her twins; and the way she tries to reconcile my good and tried advice with all the modern notions! And Rodney — why, these young people have quite suddenly grown up into a world that they think cannot possibly be the same one *we*

grew up into! But I forgot! You do know something about their problems, too — don't you? How is your Vieva coming along?"

"Oh, famously! She's really a good deal of a dear — Vieva!"

Ann was silent for the distance of at least half a block. Then she said, in a tone that was softened and rather anxious and a little sad,

"Mats, don't answer me if you'd rather not — I know I'm nothing but an interfering old woman! But — has it ever occurred to you that this Vieva child is overly fond of playing the coquette? Ah — it was n't fair of me to ask that, was it?" she hastened to add, for Martha had flushed under the first question. "I hate to see my Rodney hurt, just the same!"

"Rodney!" cried Martha; and if her tone held a shade of relief in it, Rodney's anxious mother was unobservant of it.

"Oh, of course he's always been in love with one girl or another, and he's had his — his jolts, and I dare say he's given them. But I know my boy — and he's quite desperately serious about Genevieve's girl, and I hate to see the little chit playing with him."

Martha recalled Vieva's confidences on the afternoon of her return. "Are you sure that she is playing with him, Nance?" she asked. "What makes you think so?"

"Oh, my dear! If you knew the boy, and could see him now! He used to tell me all about things, and now he does n't say one word; and when I mentioned seeing Vieva out skating the other day with that young Martin, I wish you could have seen my Rodney!"

"Rodney need not be afraid of Thomas Aquinas!" Martha affirmed. "You may tell him that much from me!"

"Oh, I could n't mention the creature to him again," said Ann. "Besides, there's some one else he is jealous of too. He will not tell me who it is, but he says the man is old enough to be Vieva's father. He gets quite furious about it."

Ann was too absorbed in the troubles of her boy to observe Martha's face, which had turned curiously pale. For the life of her Martha could not have spoken; but Ann went on with a sigh, —

"Oh, dear! I do wish our young men could win their maids by right of conquest, or else that Rod and I had enough money to dower

our young people! It will be years before poor Rodney can afford to marry — and you can just imagine a girl of Vieva's type waiting for him, can't you, in this age of impatience and rush and hurry! Which brings us back, my dear," she added, with one of the smiles that made her friends adore her, laying her hand for a moment on Martha's arm, "to the question of life's little complications! For it's no use denying, Mats, that life is complicated!"

That, it seemed, Martha had no intention of denying; her thoughts had flown back to earlier hours of uneasiness, even of actual doubts and heart-burning. *Who* was the man whose name Rodney would not tell his mother?

"You know, Mats, sometimes I wonder if we modern women, women like you and me, have n't too many jobs?"

"Oh, we're still women, if that's what you mean!"

"Yes, we're still women! That's just it! We are doing work that used to be men's work, and we are keeping right on doing work that used to be women's work — and still is, and must be."

"But a lot of the work we do, Nance, was not done at all, and not so very long ago at that! Now, take that sub-committee on —"

"Bother your sub-committees! I admit them — their importance, their need of being, and all that! But they are part of our complications, are n't they? Women of our sort nowadays are women of business, and important business at that — and with very little of the efficient help that men in our positions would somehow or other get hold of or call into being. Why, Martha Ramsay, you and I, and ever so many like us, have n't even the paid business woman's regular hours and the understanding on her part and the part of the world that her business is the thing of first importance! We — we are still in a state of scrambling — and inefficiency. We are being dragged — and dragging ourselves, for that matter — hither and yon, helter-skelter, doing really big work, I'll admit — but not as it ought to be done. We are doing it — as women do it!"

"Oh, it is not as bad as that, Nance! What's the matter with you to-day?"

"Yes, it is! Why, you and I have less pose

than most of us, Mats, but even you and I feel rather pleased with ourselves when we put a thing through, don't we? Instead of taking it as part of the day's work and forgetting it by the time we are on the next thing on the programme! 'New women'! Martha Ramsay, there's just one thing we 'new women' have got to forget — no, two things — before we can be what the Lord intends us to be, *just women*, neither new nor old! We've got to forget to smirk with self-complacency, and we've got to forget to look tense!"

Martha laughed merrily. "Oh, Nance, you renegade! Would you have it all resolve itself to looks again? Is the world always to be bounded by the walls of Troy?"

Ann Brookes refused to be laughed out of her mood, and sighed. "I am not at all sure that it is n't, whether we want it to be or not," said she. "When I think of my boy Rodney, and that Vieva child! Some things are eternal, my dear!"

"Some things are great nonsense!" Martha affirmed.

And yet, for all her laughing at Ann, their talk remained in her memory and came back

to her again and again. Rodney's trouble was of course more to his mother than to herself, Martha; but as for the "Vieva child" — it was hard, indeed, to avoid thinking about Vieva. Vieva's laugh, Vieva's sunny presence, her comings and goings, her young friends, her innumerable telephone conversations of wondrous length, her boxes of candy which everlastingly had to be forbidden to the children, and the scent of her many offerings of flowers —oh, Vieva's presence was everywhere in the house, and more and more it came to seem to Martha that she was to remain with them forever. To be sure, in the first outpouring of her sympathy for Genevieve and the self-reproachful consciousness of having, almost having, forgotten Genevieve's existence, — and after she had been so marvelously kind during those never-to-be-forgotten weeks of sadness and illness too! — she had, indeed, invited Genevieve's daughter to visit her for a winter — and the winter was not yet over. But it seemed, and daily grew in seeming, the longest winter Martha ever had known.

It was a week or so, perhaps, after her talk

with Ann Brookes that Martha arrived at the club one morning to find her sister-in-law's resplendent limousine before the door; and seated on the smallest chair in the outer office of the penny-lunch committee was Mrs. Frothingham, very erect, very elegant, looking somehow as though she were performing the part of friendly visitor of the Charities Bureau, doing her duty in spite of possible contamination, and most curiously seeming entirely to fill that room wherein a dozen women often found themselves most comfortable and with plenty of space. Josephine, looking even more tense than usual, had been trying to steer a middle course between answering Mrs. Frothingham's questions and going on with her work: when Martha opened the door she threw her a look of devotion in which relief was also plainly visible.

"Ah, Helen! This is delightful of you! You have come to subscribe to our penny-lunch fund, I know, — and to think that I had forgot to ask you for anything!"

Nothing less than the feeling of impending trouble which had swept over Martha at sight

of the automobile outside would have encouraged her to such a flight of daring as this.

Mrs. Frothingham, however, was equal to the occasion, and scorned subterfuge.

"When I feed the poor," said she, "I prefer to know that they are *deserving* poor. I also prefer to give them good food — and you cannot convince me, Martha, that any luncheon costing a penny could possibly be fit to eat!"

"Deserving or not, Helen, school-children are bound to be hungry. And we don't *buy* the lunches for a penny apiece, you know. We —"

"You sell for less than you pay? I'm afraid you do not know the first principles of business, my dear. And that, I fancy, is true of most women of — er — your sort! But that is not what I came here to talk about."

"I suppose not," Martha murmured.

"Naturally, I went to your *home* first. But you were not there. Then I came here — your maid thought that you could be found here."

"Yes," said Martha.

"What I have to say is important. I wish to speak to you *alone*." Mrs. Frothingham's look toward the busy Josephine would have been

emphasis enough; and obviously Josephine was not so busy that she did not hear, for she instantly arose, gathered a handful of papers, went into the inner office and closed the door behind her.

"Are you sure that woman does not listen behind the door?" Mrs. Frothingham asked.

"Why — does any one?" Martha returned. By this time she was ready for anything, since Helen was evidently in her most characteristic mood.

Mrs. Frothingham contented herself with replying to this retort only by raising her eyebrows. When she spoke it was in a voice not lowered in the least, and not, at first, in the least shaken.

"I will not waste time," she said. "I will come at once to the point. It is for your good as well as for mine. That girl of Genevieve's, my dear Martha, is a designing creature. It is not for your good nor for mine that she should remain here any longer."

"Oh, Helen, you are really making yourself absurd! Poor little Vieva! Why, she —"

"Do not interrupt me, please," Mrs. Froth-

ingham said, outwardly still serene, but with a slight flush on her cheek — a reflection, perhaps, of Martha's deeper one. "I have thought this out, you may be sure, and I am right. You will admit that I am usually right! This girl of Genevieve's should not remain here any longer — certainly no longer than is absolutely necessary."

Mrs. Frothingham paused. Martha found herself intensely on Vieva's side, and also found herself too angry to reply.

"Do you understand what I mean?" Mrs. Frothingham demanded.

"Pray explain yourself a little more," said Martha.

"Then please remember that you asked me to, my dear!" said Mrs. Frothingham. "I hoped that a mere hint from me would be enough! But if not — then permit me to say, my dear Martha, that this Genevieve should not be allowed to remain in your house any longer."

Now Martha was cold; it was incredible that Helen should have dared to say that; but since she had! "Is my house too near yours, Helen? Is it possible that you permit yourself to be

jealous of Mr. Frothingham's fondness for a little slip of a girl, your own cousin?"

"Andrew is an old fool. That is the worst and the best that can be said of Andrew! But Andrew is not too old to make a dunce of himself over this *baby*, and neither — is — Robert! The men are all alike — even young Martin, of whom I must say I did think better! As for Robert — his attentions to that designing young minx are the talk of the town. Of course you, his wife, would not have heard —"

Martha arose. "You dare to say that to Robert's wife?" she demanded.

Mrs. Frothingham also arose. "It is Robert's sister who dares to say it! And I tell you for your own good," said she, and sailed out of the room.

XI

THE talk of the town! Her husband, Robert Ramsay! And Vieva!

For a few minutes after her sister-in-law marched out of the office of the penny-lunch committee, Martha Ramsay stood with clenched hands and flaming cheeks, too angry to move. That Helen had dared, that any one should have dared, to say such a thing about Robert! "The talk of the town!" Oh, never, never, *never* would she believe it. She had been busy — yes, she knew she had been busy and had thrown them together, Robert and Vieva; she knew that Robert had been seen with the girl many times and often when she herself, Martha, was not with them. But surely, surely people understood! It was only among their own friends, in their own circle, that the two had gone out together; for years she and Robert had lived among these people, been a part of the social fabric of the community; were their years of direct honesty and right living

to be forgotten just because Bert — No! No, she would not believe it! The testimony of their wedded affection and the solid happiness of their married state must — oh, it *must* far outweigh any such flimsy, transitory evidence as Bert's being seen with — yes, and his being openly attentive to — a young girl like Vieva! Helen was abominable to have said such a thing! It was impossible that even Helen had believed it. Ah — she had been disagreeable to Helen, yes! And Helen had retaliated in the way she thought would hurt most!

Martha pressed her hands to her cheeks. Well, Helen's accusation of Bert was not what hurt most — it was too wild, too incredible! Martha's cause for anger went far deeper than that — as far, in fact, as the innermost secret depth of her own conscience. For Helen had shown her what she was. The mirror had been held up to her own inner consciousness, and the reflection she had beheld was not a lovely one. She herself, like Helen, had descended to jealousy, to suspicion, distrust. Helen — Helen had always been somewhat ridiculous; and that she should now openly display the very same feel-

ings that she, Martha, had nursed in secret—! Oh, it was intolerable! Helen was jealous of Andrew! Helen disliked poor little innocent Vieva, and wanted her out of the way, permanently out of the way where Andrew could not be further enmeshed in her charms! Vieva's charms, indeed! The mere youthful prettiness of a girl of twenty! That was what Helen had feared, and that — yes, that was what she, Martha Ramsay, had feared! How detestable it was! She had always secretly scorned Helen's littleness, and she was sharing that littleness! Helen was the sort of woman who for long had seemed to Martha the least worthy, the least admirable; and here she was, as like Helen as though their minds had been poured from one mould! Was it possible that for all her freedom, for all her development, for all that she had inwardly felt herself to be — was it possible that in spite of that she was still only the original undeveloped female, the — the *cat* — under the veneer? Oh! That Helen should have shown her what she was! That she should have to admit to herself that she was like this, a horried, old, jealous, foolish, narrow —

"Josephine," she called, giving herself a little shake, both mental and actual, and opening the door of the inner office into which the secretary had retreated. "Josephine, have you ever felt that you were looking rather especially well, with a new hat and half an hour spent in doing up your hair, and suddenly caught sight of yourself in a looking-glass or a shop-window or something, and found you were a *fright?*"

Miss Mason sat back in her chair and looked up. She was not overly endowed with a sense of humor, and she was so unmistakenly plain of feature and spare of frame that she had no delusions as to her own appearance at any time; but yet, looking now at Martha, she smiled.

At the moment Martha's hair was slightly frowzled and her hat was the least little bit too much on one side; but she was far from being a fright, and Josephine adored her. Moreover, all unsuspected by Martha, Josephine knew her very well, understood most of her moods, most of her impulses; for she was of that class of women to whom motherhood would have brought a wide understanding, and who, when motherhood is denied them, are apt to center their

affections — and consequently their understanding sympathy — upon some man or woman younger than themselves. Josephine's nature was not strong enough to affect Martha's; indeed, the brilliant Mrs. Ramsay was only amusedly aware of her secretary's devotion, and thought of her as a personality not at all. But now Josephine looked up at Martha and smiled; the walls between the inner and outer office had not been thick enough to deaden Mrs. Frothingham's resonant tones, and Josephine knew more than she had any intention of disclosing.

"My old grandfather was a countryman, Mrs. Ramsay, and very fond of his gun. I've heard him say that if you brought down one white goose out of a flock, it did n't follow that the whole flock were white."

Martha sat down and looked steadily at Josephine, surprised at her discernment.

"Bother your grandfather!" she said finally, with a little laugh. "But you're something of a dear, sometimes, Josephine! Now, let's go over that list of estimates! And did you remember to telephone Miss Wendell?"

"Miss Wendell will answer for herself!" a brisk voice exclaimed from the doorway. "Hello, Mats! H'are you, Miss Mason? Mat, I've just heard something! There's a special meeting of the School Board to-night, and Mr. Mulheimer will not be present. He is the man who leads the opposition, you know. Now, if we can present our petition to-night, and be prepared to hammer prices and statistics at them— "

"We can!" cried Martha. "You and I will go before the Board, whether the other members of the committee can or not. Will you telephone them, Kate, while I finish the drafting of the petition?"

So they plunged into work. Within the hour the outer office was busy with women talking, reading, comparing. The day for which they had been working was at hand; Mr. Mulheimer had been a tower of opposing strength, and if they could get the petition before the Board in his absence, and their convincing facts — oh, it was an opportunity not to be missed, an opportunity which might not come again that year! And Martha was the guiding force, cool, clear-headed, thinking quickly, attending to

innumerable details and bringing order out of disorder; she was exhilarated by the work, oblivious of the passing of time and of everything except the necessity of having all in order for the invasion of the School Board, until one of the committee exclaimed, —

"*Are* we going to have anything to eat to-night? I, for one, am starving!"

Then she remembered to ask Josephine to telephone her house that she would not be home for dinner; and shortly thereafter some one brought her a cup of coffee and some sandwiches which she munched while she worked. It was long past eight when she and her committee closed the door of the office; at ten forty-five they came triumphantly from the meeting of the Board, certain that their petition would be granted and penny lunches be assured in the schools; and eleven o'clock found her once more in her own living-room. Bert and Vieva were out — she had really forgotten where Vieva was going, that night, but evidently it was some place where she needed a chaperon.

The pleasant room was warm; there was a great vase-full of long-stemmed roses on the

table, some of Vieva's trophies, doubtless. Their fragrance, and the warmth, and the comfortable big chair were enough to invite drowsiness; she lowered the wick of the reading-lamp on the table and switched off the electrics, swung the big chair closer to the glowing embers in the fireplace, turned its high back toward the light, and contentedly snuggled down to await the return of the others.

She must have dozed; the sound of Bert's voice aroused her, or the words he was saying. They were quite familiar words, and spoken in the tone a man uses when there is no one to hear save the woman he is speaking to. To Martha's half-awakened senses it was almost as though Bert were bending over herself; and she raised her arms above her head, sleepily, lazily, unconsciously expecting them to find Bert's dear self.

Instead, she was startled into full wakefulness by a woman's exclamation. She half rose, half turned in her chair in time to see the two move quickly apart. Even in the dim light she could see Vieva's hand go to her throat and her cheeks flush; and Bert was staring at Martha —

SHE HALF ROSE, HALF TURNED IN HER CHAIR IN TIME TO SEE THE TWO MOVE QUICKLY APART

rather foolishly, rather vacantly, then with an effort at nonchalance which was surely no less foolish.

"Oh, hello, Pats," said he. "You — er — you —"

Martha sank down into her big chair again, and Bert came and bent over her.

"When did you get back?" he asked, almost in his usual tone, and kissed her hair. "Tired, old girl?"

Martha's heart was beating so that she thought Bert must surely hear it. There seemed to be a tight band about her throat, and her brain felt as though it were on fire. What — what had he been saying to Vieva, and why, why, *why* had they stopped talking so suddenly, and moved apart, and generally behaved like children caught with their hands in the sugar-bowl?

Had she obeyed her strongest impulse she would have risen, raised her arms, shrieked, become the primal woman and let her anger and her jealousy and her sense of outrage drive her to a relieving outburst. It was a situation elemental enough, and surely her nature was meet-

ing it with emotions as elemental! But over the warp and woof of her being there was a pattern of civilization. She could not shriek, she could not rage and vituperate; the inheritance of a long line of self-controlled women and the training of all her own life forbade that. And there was, moreover, something else that forbade it — her pride, and the knowledge through and beyond it all that safety for herself and for Bert and for the dearness of their marriage did not lie that way. She might not even permit the relief of tears. The one safe thing to do was to meet Bert's calmness with calmness, and his caress with a caress.

She put up her hand and took one of his, drawing him down until he was sitting on an arm of the chair, and raising the hand until her cheek rested against it, although anger still blazed in her heart and the effort was tremendous.

"Awfully tired!" she said. "I think I must have been asleep! I did n't hear you two come in. Did you have a good time, Vieva?"

Vieva laughed — a low little laugh that had an unmistakable note of embarrassment in it

and as unmistakably a note of relief. She came forward to the hearth, and spoke rapidly, excitedly.

"Oh, yes, Cousin Martha! It was the prettiest party I have ever seen! Carola had just tons of flowers — and Cousin Robert sent me those lovely, lovely roses! I would n't carry them because I wanted you to enjoy them with me!"

It takes an exceptional woman to enjoy another woman's roses — when they have been paid for with the money of one's own husband. . . . But Vieva's excited chatter was going on.

"And oh, Cousin Martha, Cousin Robert has a cold! That's why I made him bring me home early. He really ought to take some aspirin or something, don't you think so? I have some in my room — don't you think he really ought to take it? I'd be glad to run up and get it —"

Martha stirred, and forced herself to smile. Bert had a cold — Vieva had made him come home early — Vieva's anxiety — and Bert's smug silence under it — oh!

"Don't you worry about Bert, my dear," she said — and for the life of her she could not keep the note of dryness out of her voice. "Bert's

colds never amount to anything. There's plenty of aspirin in the house —"

"Oh, I'm all right!" said Bert. He had risen from the arm of her chair when Martha spoke, and moved toward the victrola. In an instant it was grinding forth a syncopated dance tune.

"Come along, Vieva, and try that funny step with me," he said, holding out his arms for Vieva's young radiance, "the one you did with young Brookes. You need n't have let him take that dance away from me, you know," he added, as they moved away in time to the music, he in the mock pursuit, she in the feminine retreat of the dance.

She flashed an upward look at him, then bent her head. Martha saw the look, and heard her low little laugh and her reply. "And you need n't have been so cross and sulky about it!" she said.

They had lost themselves in the appeal of the dance, and Martha watched them. Vieva was exquisite this evening; Bert never looked as well as in the severity of evening black and white, and to-night there was a look of excitement on his face. As she watched, a great

enveloping mantle of age seemed to descend upon her, to enshroud her; the two who were dancing at this hour of midnight seemed immeasurably young, and she seemed immeasurably old. Bert's face was flushed; he was looking down at Vieva's bright hair. Did men always retain the vitality of youth and youth's keenness of enjoyment? Bert was older than herself — yet there he was dancing, while she, Martha, was tired, tired.

Bert sprang to the phonograph as its dull scraping replaced the dance tune.

"No, don't put another one on, Bert," Vieva said. "I'm going to bed — and you really ought not to dance with that cold. You might get overheated — might n't he, Cousin Martha?"

"Bert"! "Cousin Martha"!

There was no need for Martha to reply. The erstwhile Cousin Robert submitted himself with masculine smugness to the girl's solicitude. He must sit in the other big chair, and Vieva — might she, Cousin Martha? — would start the fire going — oh, with just one log! She knew how late it was! And would n't Bert like her

to get his smoking-stand? Or — or anything? Yes, she would fill his pipe for him — and hold the match —

But at last Vieva said good-night, and they heard her footfall on the stairs. Bert was sitting low on his spine, his feet crossed and stretched out toward the blaze, his oldest and best-beloved pipe in his mouth, a picture of masculine contentment — and, as Martha reminded herself, of good, simple, innocent, masculine contentment. Bert's world was perfectly all right — and no one knew as well as Martha that it would not, could not, be perfectly all right if his conscience were not clean. She, Martha, was miserable, however little one would have thought it, seeing her there in front of the hearth in Darby and Joan fashion with her Robert; and yet, even through her misery, she knew she must acquit Bert of intention to offend, of any least thought of disloyalty to herself. Bert was all right — all *right!* Of *course* he was!

Martha rose, stroked Bert's hair in passing, and said, as she moved toward the door, —

"Don't hurry up on my account, old man!

I'm tired — I shall follow Vieva's good example and say good-night!"

"Night!" said he, across his pipe. "Don't mind my staying up a bit?"

"Of course not!" she assured him, and went upstairs, leaving him to his thoughts.

What were they, she wondered? She would, at the moment, have given anything she had to know what and of whom he was thinking — and at the same time she accused herself of being a foolish woman for so much as wondering. As if she could not trust him! As if she need follow him into the realm of thought, in order to be sure of his loyalty, his devotion.

She went down the upper hall to the door of Bobby's nursery. Hedwig was sleeping in a manner which permitted no doubt of its being sound; Martha stole across the room to Bobby's little bed. The child was lying on his back, outstretched as though he had fallen there from some high summit of dreams. One rosy palm was but half released from his go-to-sleep grasp of a well-worn teddy-bear; the other was flung upward across his pillow, touching his curls.

Martha bent above him; he was very like his father, and his dearness was, above and beyond all else, that he was Bert's little son. She sank to her knees beside his bed, and hid her face against his pillow.

XII

The culminating event of the year at the Woman's Club was the Founders' Day luncheon, toward which the weeks were moving as swiftly as only the crowded weeks of late winter can move. The important day had an established programme of its own, with its reception to members and their honored guests, the luncheon itself, and the little five-minute speeches; and finally, in the big ballroom of the club, the great speech or paper of the year, by one of the club's own members.

The Founders' Day Address, as it was called, was a distinction much coveted, and to be asked to read it was an honor bestowed upon the woman who, in the opinion of the executive board, had accomplished the most important work of the preceding year. It was Mrs. Brookes, herself a founder of the club, who announced to Martha that this year she had been singled out for the honor.

"But they made me do it two years ago!"

Martha exclaimed in a note of protest. "Why again this year?"

Josephine, who had risen from her place at the typewriter at Mrs. Brookes's news, clasped her hands tightly together and exclaimed an admiring, protesting, "Oh, Mrs. Ramsay!"

But Ann Brookes laughed.

"If it were any one but you, Mats, who asked that, I should say it was a pose! As it is, I suppose you think you're too busy to get the thing up!"

"No," said Martha calmly, "not that; I suppose there's always time for one thing more! It's just that I don't know what in the world to talk about!"

Ann looked at her quizzically. "You might do worse, you know, than talk about what we all think we are — the new woman — the new Eve — that sort of thing."

"I'm not up on feminism."

"Oh, you would n't have to be," said Ann, rather cryptically, and left it at that.

Yet, through the crowded days which followed, Ann's words kept recurring to Martha whenever she thought of the speech. For, in

spite of her easy assumption that there was always time for one thing more, it seemed as though there would not be time for any proper preparation of that paper. Founders' Day was on the morrow before she knew it, and there was not a note made, not a line written. The conscientious Josephine was deep in distress, yet not even her efficiency could plan for uninterrupted time for its preparation. And then, on the very morning itself, as Martha was getting into the new gown which she had ordered for the eventful day, the telephone rang. Vieva and Hedwig were in attendance upon the undiscovered hooks and eyes of the new gown.

"Vieva, do answer that 'phone! I'm sure it's for you, you popular child," said Martha.

But a moment later Vieva came back.

"It was n't for me, Cousin Martha! It is Miss Wendell, and she says she knows she's a wretch, but she *must* speak to you."

So Martha crossed the room to the bedside telephone, and in a moment was listening to Kate Wendell's anxious tone and excited words.

"Mats! I've just discovered the most amaz-

ing thing! There is to be a meeting of the School Board to-day at one o'clock! Mr. Mulheimer, of course, — he counts on our not knowing about it, and on the men who are on our side not getting to the meeting. They will *kill* our petition —"

"But they don't meet in the daytime at all!" cried Martha, catching some of Kate's excitement. "You must be mistaken, Kate!"

"I am not mistaken. They meet on call of the chairman, and Mr. Gould is in Florida, and that makes Mulheimer chairman *pro tem.* His stenographer, little Adela Schmitt, used to be in my settlement class. She telephoned me an hour ago that she had something on her mind that she thought I ought to know, and asked me to meet her in the rest-room at the Bee Hive. She told me about the meeting. Mulheimer will discharge her if he finds out she's given him away. She's almost in tears about it, but she knows what it will mean to have the lunches, and — *what* shall we do, Martha?"

"It's Founders' Day!"

"I know! Mulheimer knew, too!"

Martha's hesitation was not long; she could

think and plan quickly in an emergency — and their whole winter's work was at stake.

"Kate, we shall have to miss the luncheon! There is just one thing to do — we must corral every member of that Board that we know is favorable to us, and get him to that meeting somehow, and on time."

"But Martha — *how?*"

"We must not trust to telephoning those men. I'll have Josephine get hold of the other women on the committee, and each one must go after a School Board member and motor him to that meeting. It's at one o'clock, you say? Oh, that sharp old wretch! But no matter! Meet me at the office in ten minutes!"

She telephoned Josephine, and turned to the waiting two in her room with a little laugh.

"Oh, Cousin Martha!" Vieva cried, "you won't have a chance to wear that love of a dress to the luncheon! How heart-breaking!"

Martha patted the girl's shoulder. "Never mind, Vieva! It's good ammunition, and I shall need it before the morning's out!"

As she was going down the stairs a few minutes later, Vieva called over the banister to

remind her that they were all to go to Grace Atkinson's to dinner that evening; Grace was Ann Brookes's daughter, and this was her first large social effort since the arrival of the twins.

It was well on in the afternoon when Martha stopped her taxicab at the corner of the street; there was a long and varied line of motor vehicles at the curb, and passing slowly before the door of the Woman's Club, for the club's hospitality was widely extended for the afternoon meeting and the annual address.

Kate Wendell was with her, and as their cab was stopped in the line she put her head out of the window.

"There goes Mrs. Fisher, Mats, and you *know* she is always the last one!" she said, in a tone of mock despair.

Already Martha's hand was on the door.

"Then we will get out here," she said. And together the two ran up the steps of the club, Martha taking her way to the side passage which led to the stage, Kate going on to the floor of the beautiful ballroom, now crowded even to the limits of its half-encircling gallery with well-dressed, murmuring women waiting

for the fall of the president's little gold-mounted gavel. Martha could see the crowd through the arches as she made her way down the side of the room, and she knew that the president would step forward from the shield of palms as soon as she, Martha Ramsay, should be safely upon the platform; yet for all that her step was unhurried. Suddenly — the price of her preceding weeks of effort and the triumph from which she had just come — suddenly there had come over her a weariness of brain and body, crushing and benumbing; she was like a runner who is spent when the goal is in sight, and she dimly wondered how she could stand forth before that multitude and talk. If only she had obeyed Josephine's pleadings and written her speech —

Then she opened the little door at the back of the stage and looked past the women seated there to the murmurous crowd beyond.

"Good Heavens, Mats," said the president, coming toward her, "we were almost paralyzed with fright! We thought you were not coming at all! And — oh, what *is* the matter, my dear? You look —"

The other women had also risen and were

pressing about her. "Oh, Mrs. Ramsay! How did the School Board — " and "Did we lose?" and "Did they act upon the petition?" were some of the questions they were outpouring upon her.

Martha tried to smile, but her lips and her cheeks felt wooden.

"We won," she said, and could say no more.

There was no need for more words, however, from her. The president went directly forward, brought down her gavel with a triumphant bang, and, out of place though it was, made the announcement that the project so dear to the hearts of the members was an accomplished fact: penny lunches would be established at once in the schools of the city! It was contrary to the tradition of the club openly to credit any member with work accomplished; that was supposed to be common achievement, common triumph if fortune favored. Martha's name was not mentioned in connection with the announcement, but scarcely a woman there did not know that the speaker of the day was also the chairman of the campaign thus brought to so timely and successful a conclusion.

The routine of the short open meeting was over in a few minutes after the applause following the president's announcement had subsided; then she introduced the speaker of the day.

The subject was "Woman's New Freedom"; and of all who might have been asked to speak upon it there was none, perhaps, better qualified — at least in the opinion of the present audience — than Mrs. Robert Livingston Ramsay. The president said as much in introducing her; Mrs. Ramsay, she told them, was not alone one of the leaders of the forward movement of woman: she was an exponent of woman's new development of power, fulfilling the duties of wife, mother, and housekeeper as capably as the most old-fashioned housewife, and being also a leader in the multitudinous occupations and interests of women which had come to play so large and important a part in the life of the city, the state, and the country.

Martha listened, wondering all the while whether it would be possible for her to rise to her feet, to move forward even so far as the speaker's little table; she was dimly, miserably certain that she should not be able to speak if

she got there. Every faculty seemed benumbed with fatigue, every muscle ached. She had fought a long battle through the winter, and to-day she had won it — and now there was this one thing more to be done.

Then the president paused, turned a little, spoke her name — and Martha felt herself, dimly, as it were, through that haze of deadening fatigue, moving forward, bowing, smiling — and then waiting for the room to be still. It seemed as though it never would: the applause that had followed the president's first announcement was as nothing compared to that which greeted Martha in this moment of her triumph.

In the sea of faces Martha could not fail to distinguish some; the intentness of their expression made them stand out, as it were, admiring, congratulatory. There was precious Ann Brookes, looking happy and slightly quizzical; and Kate Wendell, good sport, who was generously forgetting her own share in the triumph in her satisfaction over Martha's; and Josephine — faithful little hard worker, now clenching her hands and bending forward, all anxiety lest her idol might really not know what to say!

Martha looked at Josephine, made the least little *moue*, and laughed. Josephine's expression was the one thing which could bring her out of her maze: Josephine *was* so absurd! Suddenly that mantle of fatigue dropped behind her; suddenly, as she took a step forward, she felt curiously refreshed and strengthened, as an athlete feels on his second wind. Even the mists that had befogged her brain had faded away. The discourse that she had subconsciously pondered for days was as clear before her as though it were in Josephine's neat typing. Again she took a short step forward, raised her head a little, looked over the crowd. It became still under her look.

It was on her closing sentences that their applause rang longest. She had neatly summed up the effects on woman of the endeavor of the past years, gently ironical, ignoring the usual arguments or declaring them to be out of date. Her hearers laughed with her, were serious when she wanted them to be, had plenty to take home with them. She knew well how to sway them as she liked; many times before had she faced audiences as large, and many times had

she faced audiences far smaller and infinitely more difficult; her words and intonations carried into the farthest corners of the crowded room, and there were many there besides her own close friends who told themselves that she had never been so gracious, so captivating, so clear and witty and convincing.

And then, at the last, she came to the summing-up of her discourse. Opposition, she told them, women need no longer fear; rather should they ignore it, set it aside as worthless. Then she concluded,—

"So let us no longer clamor for mere equality with men. To do so is as much a thing of the past as to wear hoop-skirts and poke-bonnets, or to faint at every unexpected emotion, or to speak stridently of our rights — our rights! Are our rights no more — as they are surely no less — than the rights of men? Why need we measure or limit our development by the development of man, forsooth? The new woman has gone far, far beyond that! Eve to-day — the new Eve — can afford to recognize and acknowledge her debt to Adam! She can even afford to cancel his greater indebtedness to her-

self! Unafraid of old traditions, untrammeled by old bonds, boldly standing before the supreme court of her own judgment, she sets her goal on the topmost pinnacle of her imagination, courageous in the conviction of her soul that there is no peak too high for her to scale."

So saying, Mrs. Robert Livingston Ramsay paused, waited a moment in the tense stillness of the crowded room as though entranced by the magic of the picture her own words had painted, and then smiled that faint little smile, gave them a slightly softened look, that was the signal for their outburst of applause. In the instant before she stepped back she once more caught Ann's quizzical little smile, once more looked down at Josephine, whose face was no less tense than before, although now its expression was wholly worshipful.

Another moment and the room was in the pleasant turmoil of a dispersing crowd of women — for the most part low-voiced, with enunciation clear and careful, their greetings now mingling with the rustle of garments and the moving of chairs. Several women on the floor were pressing forward toward the plat-

form, their eyes on Martha; and already Martha was the center of a little group.

"Mats, when you came in you looked too tired to breathe — and yet you never spoke so well! How *do* you do it?"

"Mrs. Ramsay, you know I'm not sure that I quite agree with you."

"Martha, was Mulheimer utterly abominable? Was there much of a row?"

"Mrs. Ramsay, we missed you at the luncheon, but surely your morning —"

Thus went some of the sentences that she tried to catch from all sides at once.

"Don't fail to come down to the office just as soon as you can get away from the rabble," said another, "for there is still —"

"Very well, Miss Hilton, I'll try to come right down," she said to this one, over her shoulder. "I must speak to —"

And so it went, while Martha slowly made her way down from the platform, only to be met by other greetings as pressing; until, with the adroitness of the woman who has done it many times before, she had spoken to this one and that, said an appropriate word to people

who were introduced to her, answered a question here and remembered to ask another, all the while moving toward the door, and toward the little room downstairs where her own particular cronies, and the members of the jubilant committee, would be waiting. At the head of the stairs the ever-faithful Josephine was standing, and smiling. Martha lightly pinched her arm, called her a goose, and together they went into the office.

Kate Wendell was standing in the middle of the floor, describing the stormy meeting of the School Board for the benefit of those who had not been present. As Martha opened the door she was declaiming, —

"And that, if you please, was Mulheimer, who has no more qualification for being on a School Board at all than Tony the garbageman has, and who has n't a chick nor a child of his own! I shall never, as long as I live, touch another glass of beer!"

At the absurd anti-climax most of the women laughed. Only one small person, with a thin face and black eyes and a nervous manner, seemed to take Kate seriously.

"Oh, but, Miss Wendell," she said, "I am all for temperance, myself, but we must admit that all brewers are not Mulheimers!"

"No," said Kate, perching on the edge of the table, "and some Mulheimers are doctors, and some are lawyers, and some — oh, ever so many are quite respectable fathers of families! But believe *me*, when a man is a Mulheimer, he's a — he's a —"

Again the other women were laughing, but again the black-eyed one remained serious, since argument was to her as the breath of life.

"Then you make a personal thing of it!" she began.

And Kate replied at once: "Of course I do, Betsy! I make a personal thing of everything, and so do you, and so does every one!"

"Oh, but *men* don't! Men —"

"Bless the little anti! What under heaven is more a personal thing than a vote — unless it's death or marriage! Why, girls —"

Martha loved to hear Kate's vaporings, and had not come so far into the room as to interrupt her; but Ann Brookes had seen her, and

quietly made her way around the little crowd until she was at her side.

"Mats," she whispered, "do you know the time? And do you know that my child's dinner-party is at half-past seven?"

Into Martha's memory flashed Vieva's last warning of the forenoon, and she looked blankly at Mrs. Brookes.

"Do you think we can get away?" she whispered back. "We'll have to dodge Josephine!" And together, like thieves in the night, the two stole out.

XIII

MARTHA's first thought when she got home was that she must dress as hurriedly as possible. Already, she feared, Vieva would be ready and impatient, and Bert too; and not for worlds would she be late for Grace's little dinner — Ann's girl, to whom the giving of a dinner at all was a tremendous event, with her small ménage and those precious twins who would be sure to keep their mother busy up to the last minute.

"Come up in fifteen minutes and help me with my dress, Nelly, will you?" she said, as she ran upstairs. "No, don't stop me now, not for *anything* — you may tell me whatever it is while you are hooking me up," she added, as Nelly tried to tell her something.

She flung open the door of her room, expecting to see Bert in the throes of tying his cravat, or at latest poking his head out of the dressing-room, probably with half his face in a lather. But there was no sign of Bert, and although she knew that he would come in at any moment

in a hurry to rival her own, the momentary freedom was valuable, and not to be lost. She was tired enough to be nervous, and when she was in that state it was a blessing to have the place to herself.

For she *was* so tired — Heavens, how tired she was! Not even the plunge into the hot tub, not even the brisk rub and the coolness of fresh garments made her less so.

Still Bert had not come, and she looked at the clock — if only, only there were time for a moment's rest on the couch! Nelly knocked, and Martha asked for a cup of strong tea; and then, for she could really go no further, she dropped upon the soft invitingness of the couch, and drew her pretty comfort up over.

It could not have been long before her door opened — oh, ever so gently, ever so softly and noiselessly. "I've been out here 'most an hour," a plaintive voice said.

It was Cecily, and Martha, although with a little glow of tenderness at the child's dearness, yet kept her eyes closed; if she said nothing Cecily would surely believe her asleep and go away. For a few minutes' rest she *must* have —

"I don't think you realize how lonely I am," said the small voice again. "Realize" was the favorite word of the moment, used whenever the least occasion for it could be found.

"My darling," said Martha; and in an instant Cecily was snuggling at her side on the couch. But not for long. Another minute or two and she was sitting up.

"Does your poor head ache?" she asked solicitously.

Cecily had a *flair* for nursing, and Martha might have suspected an intention in her question.

"A little."

"Do you want a cup of tea?"

"Presently."

"Well — suppose I put some bay-rum on your poor head?"

It was impossible to refuse the precious child. "I should love it," Martha murmured drowsily. For she *was* so tired! And any moment now Bert would come rushing in.

Then Cecily began to put the bay-rum on her forehead with soft little fingers which held a balm of their own.

"Does that feel good, when I go up on your hair like that?"

"Yes, my pet."

"I thought it would. That's the way daddy does with Vieva when she's been crying."

Martha lay perfectly still, in spite of the fact that at the unexpectedness of it her heart had surely missed a beat; to stop the child, to rebuke her — oh, it would never do to let her dream that she had said anything — it was just one of those times when one *must* not speak.

And in the ensuing silence it seemed as though Cecily had forgotten. Then she announced: —

"Daddy and Vieva's run away together. In an automobile."

For an instant, in her surprise, Martha was stung out of her self-control. She looked at Cecily's pensive little face so close to her own —

"Nonsense, Cecily! Of course daddy and Vieva have *not* done anything of the sort! What ever gave you such an —"

"Oh, yes, they *have*, mother! In Uncle Andrew's gray automobile. Vieva knows how

to run it. She goes out in it lots, and pretty often daddy goes, too, but she never takes me, not *once*. I did think that when my own *father* went they might let me go, too, but they would n't. Daddy just laughed at me. He said there was n't room — and you know I'm *little*, mother! I'm most as thin through as Bobby, and he's *young!* That's why I've been so lonely!"

There was nothing, nothing that Martha could say, at first; then she managed to tell Cecily, in the tone that elders use toward such childish wails, realizing while she said it that it was not true, and that it was not in the least in accordance with her cherished principles toward her children to say such a thing at all:—

"Never mind, dear! I'm sure daddy will take you next time!"

Cecily, too, seemed to feel the inadequacy of the comfort; she was silent for a minute, the gentle little fingers still moving across Martha's forehead. Then she asked:—

"Did you know daddy was in love for Vieva? He is, 'cause he sends her flowers. I asked Nelly how-come everybody sends Vieva flowers, and

she laughed, and said, that's because they are all in love for her. And now daddy sends 'em, too, so he's in love —"

"All right, darling, — mother's head is much better! Will you ask Nelly to bring up my tea now? And don't come back, Cecily; mother has to dress."

Cecily kissed her, very slowly and deliberately carried the bay-rum bottle back to its place, and reluctantly departed. When Nelly came in with the belated tea Martha was seated at her dressing-table, pale, perhaps, but outwardly calm.

"Thank you, Nelly," she said; and as the maid still lingered, "I was sorry to stop you just now, Nelly, but I was too tired to hear anything. Now tell me about it!"

"Oh, ma'am, I was that afraid you'd be worried! Mr. Ramsay got home early, ma'am, and Miss Vieva come up in the little automobile that she drives herself, ma'am, and she — and —"

"Certainly! Mr. Ramsay came home early to take a little spin with Miss Vieva — is that it?" (Oh, Cecily, Cecily, she thought! Blest,

for once, your little chattering tongue! What if she had heard this from Nelly — loyal, well-intentioned Nelly though she was!)

Nelly looked relieved, but not a little surprised as well. "Yes, ma'am! And they said as how they would be back early, and Miss Vieva asked me to lay out the blue dress for this evening and give it a little pressing. They said as how they'd be back early, ma'am, and it's long past seven now —"

"And the dinner is at a quarter-past eight — so there is plenty of time."

"Miss Vieva said it was to be at half-past seven, ma'am!"

"Miss Vieva is always in a hurry for a good time, Nelly! Mr. Ramsay telephoned me at the club that they would be late. It is quite all right, Nelly, but good of you to think about it. You have all had your dinner? Then you may go out as early as you like — I will help Miss Vieva with her dress. And no need to wait up for us, when you come in."

Unmistakable was Nelly's look of relief, unmistakable the pleasure in her voice as she said, "Oh, thank you, ma'am," and left the room.

Martha listened to her retreating footsteps, then arose, went to her door, and locked it. For a full minute she stood there, her cheeks in her hands, and never, never in her life, did she think so quickly. Whatever it was, whatever it was going to be, she must do what she could to save the situation. Think, think!

Then she moved swiftly to the telephone beside her bed — beside Bert's pillow. Mercifully the dinner was at Grace Atkinson's and mercifully Ann Brookes must be there by this time, ready to help her daughter in any way that might present itself. Mercifully, too, the servant who answered the 'phone would not recognize Mrs. Ramsay's voice.

Mrs. Brookes was there? No, not Mrs. Atkinson, but Mrs. Atkinson's mother, Mrs. Brookes? Yes? Yes, please — no, she would prefer not to give her name. . . . And then Ann's voice . . .

"Why, Mats! Why are n't you on your way? You — *what?* — Not *come?* But — Is any one *ill?* Make up a lie for you? Why, of course I can, but — Martha! What *is* it? . . . Of course I can trust you, child, — well, of course you can

trust me, then — what? — Yes, I will . . . No, no one need know! I will tell Grace and Ted not to say you were expected, and send Rodney home, and take off four places, and there'll be just eight of us instead of twelve . . . Oh, nonsense! . . . Martha, *Martha!* . . . do you want me to come to you? Oh, all right! Of course I understand — or of course I don't, but it does n't matter . . ."

And, with Ann's reassurance, and her quickly thought-of scheme for hiding their absence, at least beyond the safe knowledge of her own family, Martha felt that she could endure no more, and hung up the receiver.

Then she waited.

For a while she expected them to come in at any minute, hurried and apologetic and ashamed. They had not meant to miss the dinner — of course not — Vieva's directions to Nelly were proof enough of that. They had gone farther than they realized — perhaps they had had tire trouble, and Bert was rather a duffer about machines. It was odd that they did not telephone . . .

Why — *why* did they not telephone? The

question and a possible answer turned her cold, set her trembling.

But that was nonsense — that could not be! She would wait. They would be home in a moment, in a few minutes . . . She watched the clock. It was almost eight — then eight — ten minutes past — a vehicle came down in the street; there was the stopping of a motor, and in her quick relief she laughed, and moved toward her dress, which she had put out on the bed. But no sound followed, no opening door, no call or hurried step. She dropped the dress, went to the window — a delivery wagon was stopping at the next place, and nothing else was in sight.

She heard Cecily's protest at being urged to bed by Hedwig, she heard Ruth's gentle good-night through the closed door — and she waited.

Half-past eight came. She was mastered by the thought which had been tormenting her, and she arose, moved slowly about the room, looking, searching for something. But there was no note — of course she knew there was not! In Vieva's room? She opened her door

and went up the stairs. Her cheeks were burning with the shame of it, her heart was beating so that she felt suffocated, yet she crossed the room to Vieva's dressing-table, to the mantel, to the little desk. There was no note anywhere — of course there was not! How *could* she have permitted herself to search, to doubt?

She returned to her own room, sat on the couch, and waited. She clasped her cold hands together to still their trembling, and watched the clock until watching became intolerable; she would turn her gaze away for what seemed hours, only to look again and find that her hours were scarcely minutes.

A quarter of nine — nine — five minutes past — a quarter-past . . .

She, Martha Ramsay, of whom it had been said only a few hours before that she was a brilliant exponent of woman's new development of power, a leader in the forward movement of woman — she, who herself had spoken of woman's new freedom, of being untrammeled by old bonds, unafraid of old traditions — she, that same Martha Ramsay, must wait, as gen-

erations of women had waited, from Eve and her daughters down through the ages, waited, waited, *waited* . . .

She watched the clock. Through the horrible weight of her earlier burden of fatigue, which was still upon her, there was this other, more pressing, more poignant — waiting.

Half-past nine — oh, something horrible had happened! She could not endure it! She could not! She must do something — call aloud, or telephone to the police or the hospitals! But no! No, madness lay that way, or — or disgrace. . . . It might not be true, not — *true* — and then, if she had made it publicly known! Oh, no! She must wait. That was all she could do — wait . . .

She crouched down, hiding her head. She saw Bert dead, crushed and dead, and herself not there . . . Oh, no, no — *no!* A prayer rose to her lips, but she could not pray. She was in a desert of suffering where God was not. When little Donald died she had found comfort in prayer; then it had been her soul's reaching out to the Infinite where Donald was. But not now, not now! She must wait.

The memory of Donald, her firstborn, brought another memory, a memory of that first day, and Bert's face as he bent above her, tears in his eyes, his face still drawn from the sight of her suffering. . . . And now. . . . Oh, wait! She must not let such thoughts formulate themselves — she must *wait.*

Bert — Donald — dear kind Genevieve — and it was Genevieve's only child who — What would Genevieve . . .

She jumped up, looked at the clock — it was ten. She walked across the room, back again, up and down, back and forth. . . . A quarter-past ten — half-past . . .

Oh, the future, how long it would be, when one night was like this! And the children, the children were so little, so young — she sobbed, then clenched her hands and looked at the clock.

Eleven o'clock, half-past eleven, twelve. . . . And at five minutes past twelve the telephone rang.

It rang with a long, persistent jangle, sounding loudly in the quiet house, in the room as quiet as a room of the dead. . . . It brought her

to her feet, her lips parted, her knees trembling so that she could hardly stand. She grasped the bedpost for support while the jangle sounded again . . . then she put her hand on the receiver.

XIV

MARTHA put her hand on the receiver of the telephone — that little commonplace marvel of everyday life which forever thrills us, summons us at its will, bridges space and distance. She stood as though paralyzed, afraid to put the instrument to her ear, afraid to hear its message. To lift it, to listen, was to open the door of the future; or was it — and at the thought a new chill shook her — or was it to close the door of the past, the beloved, happy past?

Again the bell rang persistently. Long custom has taught us to obey its imperative call. She raised the receiver.

"Is this Hilton one-six-two-nine? Mrs. Ramsay, please. Hartfield calling. One moment, please!"

Hartfield calling! Why, Hartfield was miles away, a little village far up in the hills, and —

Then another voice came over the wire — a familiar voice in spite of all the distance, in spite of the hurry and anxiety in its tones.

"Hello — Hilton one-six-two-nine? *Martha!* Pats! We're all right! I say, Pats, I'm deucedly sorry! I know you've been worried to death! I tried my best to get to a telephone — you are n't *too* worried, are you? *Pats!* Are you there? Why don't you answer?"

She was shaking so that she could not stand; she fell to her knees beside the bed, the receiver still in her hand, and called upon all her self-control so that she might speak calmly.

"You are all right? Vieva, too? But where on earth —"

"We're at a farmhouse a mile and a half beyond Hartfield. First place we've struck that had a telephone. I'm awfully sorry. I got home early, you know, and thought I'd take a spin with Vieva. We — I — that is, we must have come farther than we knew, and when we found it was getting pretty late we took what we thought was a short cut, and it was a wood-road and not wide enough any place to turn the car, so we had to go on. Then we came out in a rocky pasture — Heaven knows where it is — and I was driving, and I got the control mixed, and we went into a wash-out — nothing bad!

Truly! But the axle broke. We started to walk, and Vieva turned her ankle on a stone, and — I say, Pats, we've had a deuce of a time, believe *me!* And I knew you'd be about sick with worry — What? Oh, we found a farmhouse after a while, and then we had to wait until the son got home from courting. He had the only horse. He'll drive us home, but the Lord knows when we'll get there! Horse been ploughing all day. What? Oh, the machine's still in the pasture. You are n't worried, are you? All right! 'Bye!"

She heard the click of his receiver as he hung it up, and she put her own in its place. Then she arose from her knees, sank down on the bed, and in a moment was sobbing, wildly, painfully. In her first relief she had only the one thought — he was safe! Safe — and he had been afraid she was worrying, and had telephoned as soon as he could.

But as her sobbing grew less, another thought came to her. Why had he gone at all? He had never said anything to her about all this motoring with Vieva! He had, according to Cecily's innocent revelations, been rather in the habit

of coming home early and "taking a spin with Vieva"! He knew — he must have known — that it was not the proper thing to do! He must have known that sooner or later trouble would come of it! Yet he had gone — and trouble *had* come of it, and the trouble had fallen upon her, Martha! Bert had doubtless had a hard time, what with Vieva's sprained ankle and their breaking down so far from everything; but what of that? What really mattered was that he had caused her, Martha, all this needless suffering! What if he *was* safe, what if his first thought *had* been to reassure her, what if — that she should have had to think such a thing at all! — what if her worst fears *had* been no more than dark visions of this night of agony! The relief of it all was as nothing to the anger which now surged within her at the memory of her needless suffering! That he should have dared to risk subjecting her to that! Just for the sake of a drive with — *Oh!* How could he, how *could* he?

She trembled with the force of this last emotion as she had not been shaken with her earlier fear. Then there had been need of controlling

herself, need of waiting to learn — oh, that waiting! And for what, for *what* had all her suffering been? For Bert's following, his idiotic following, of the lure of youth and — and his sheer masculine silliness over a pretty face! Oh, she acquitted him of intention to hurt her, but now that did not better things in the least! He did not think, or had not thought — but he *should* have thought! For weeks he had been foolish, silly, acting like a moon-sick youth, while she, Martha, his wife, had had to look on in silence and in endurance and in — oh, yes, she would admit it now — in fear! That was it, that was the thing which had hurt most, the thing which had made her ashamed, the thing she had been afraid to face or to admit!

She had dared Fear, thrown it a challenge by her silent acquiescence in the ridiculous situation, by her anger at poor Helen, by her insisting on keeping Vieva and her permitting and even making one opportunity after another for Bert to — Oh! and what had her challenge come to? Fear had gripped her, shaken her, all but mastered her to-night, while she waited, waited, *waited.*

Yet it had been only Fear that she had challenged, not Fate. She had known Bert too well, she knew him too well now, to suspect — ah, well, no! Not too well to suspect; she could no longer say that! But surely, yes, surely too well to believe that he would be or could be worse than silly. To-night she was ready to cry out that she had been foolish to endure even that much; yet she knew that she had endured in the first place because somewhere inside of her there was an instinct which forbade her awaking Bert's self-consciousness. Yes, it was that — he had been so adorably un-self-conscious! That was why she had let it go on, even invited it at first, when it had amused and touched her and then been rather a relief to her, in all that rush she had been in; and afterwards instinct warned her that to arouse him to consciousness might be to awaken him to something more. At the very least, it would be to know that he was cutting a silly figure in the eyes of her whom he loved; at the most, it might have been — and that was where Fear lay brooding — to a belief that this transitory whim of the moment was the reality of a lifetime.

Yes, truly, that was the very heart of the fear which she had not dared to face! And then, on the day of all days when she was least able, through her tremendous fatigue, to meet it and conquer it; on the day of her triumph as the modern woman, when she had spoken so brilliantly of the independence of the new Eve — on that day Fear had met her challenge, sought her out, shook and ravaged her and pressed its suffering and — yes — its shame upon her, while she waited, waited . . .

Oh, that waiting! She had borne pain in her time, and borne it gladly, looking forward to the triumph at its end, and finding her reward in Bert's eyes and love and the precious dearness of the babies. She had borne pain, of another sort, when they had had to give up their first-born; and then, too, she had found something in Bert's eyes and in the clasp of his hand which made the pain possible to be endured. But to-night! This had been pain of a different sort — for dread had been in it, and the foreshadowing of shame; and instead of Bert's helping her through it, he had been the cause of it — whether or not the innocent cause,

yet the cause of it, just the same! And it had been senseless, needless! They had been friends, she and Bert, above and beyond all else. Their marriage was rooted firm in friendship — not that it did not hold love and live by it, too! But the give-and-take of friendship, confidence, partnership; the sharing of everything, of the material and the spiritual alike — all that makes the best modern marriage the blessed and free and noble thing that it is — that had been theirs, always! And yet through him she had been brought to suffering that was as old as the race, an ignoble suffering, a suffering without reward or gain — she had been made to wait, to *wait* like any poor drudge of a woman whose husband was in the habit of coming home sodden or surly; and she had been made to fear and suspect and endure — oh, those immeasurable hours of waiting and not knowing!

And had she, Martha Ramsay, prattled of an Eve of to-day who was not to limit her development by the development of man? When man — oh, yes, unwittingly or not — when man could inflict or cause such suffering and such fear, how far beyond his reach might woman

hope to develop? And that goal set on the topmost pinnacle of her imagination — of what avail would that be, when a sick child's hands might draw you from it or a fear like this fear of to-night come grimacing at you? A new Eve, forsooth? No, and a thousand times no! She, Martha Ramsay, was willing to-night to acknowledge before the world and highest Heaven that woman to-day is the woman of yesterday and of all times gone by, held by the same old bonds, governed by the same, eternal emotions. For had she not been forced to endure in the same old way — since there was but the one way to endure, by waiting and watching and still waiting — the same thing which other women had had to endure, from the earliest ages down? Had she won through to anything better, worn her way or won her way or evolved her way to something better? Had she?

With that thought she laughed. So much for the new Eve! Let her accomplish what she would, become what she could, still and forever she would remain capable of such suffering as Martha Ramsay had had to endure this night, suffering as old as the world, suffering

beyond control, and suffering inflicted by man. All was superficial save the primal relations and the primal emotions. Freedom — when there was love? Freedom — where there was fear? Freedom — when there was crushing, biting, stinging suffering such as she had come through?

Then once more Martha laughed, and this time without grimness. Already, in the reaction that followed her release from fear, she was becoming her own self, quick to think, quick to resolve.

She had been treating this big delinquent baby of hers, this boy-man who had given her all this shock and fright, according to the lights of the new woman, the modern wife who holds freedom of action to be the noblest prerogative of marriage; and Bert had been behaving in the time-honored fashion of the philandering male! She, Martha, was quite willing to put the question to herself — of what avail to woman was it to have become a new Eve, if man persisted in remaining the same old Adam?

And with that question came another. How should one meet such a situation, save as other

women had met it; and how solve such a dilemma save by the methods of all her grandmothers and her grandmothers' mothers?

And those — what were they? To storm and rage, and make one's self detestable? Of small avail, that! To entwine one's arms about delinquent Adam's neck, and damply cling to him, and tell him that one could not live without him? Oh, yes, that might work — for a while, if one could bring one's self to do it. But neither of those methods held the least appeal for Martha. There was another, equally tried and tested — said to be equally as effective, and surely promising more amusement.

She thought quickly, her smile deepening, but, for all that, with a well-formed determination. She might make up her mind to use certain very old-fashioned methods, and she might have some fun out of them; but she acknowledged to herself now that she was going into a battle, one that, serio-comic though it was, was none the less real. Her happiness was to be its prize of war.

Quickly and alertly she mapped out her campaign. Its first move took her downstairs to

her pantry and kitchen; its second sent her to bed!

Not to sleep — oh, no! Anxiously enough she lay there awake until at last she heard the two returning. Her heart leaped and then fluttered as the front door closed and instantly thereafter Bert's quick rush took the stairs three at a time. But as he came to the side of the bed, her eyes opened with every effect of having just awakened, and her arm reached out to him, oh, so sleepily!

"Oh, hello, dear! Have a good time?" Thus her drowsy murmur.

But there was nothing drowsy about Bert's answer. "A good *time!* A hell of a good time! Say, wake up, Pats! Are n't you glad to see me?"

At that she sat up, and her eyes opened wide. "Oh — why — oh, you poor *dear!* You have n't just got *back?* Why — what *time* is it? You'll be *so* sleepy in the morning —"

Bert sat back and doubled on himself a little. Certainly in neither one way nor the other was this the reception he had expected! His mouth opened and he uttered a sound which Martha

would have described, if he were at all given to vulgarities, as a — a snort!

"Well, I'll be damned!" said he, and sounded almost as though he meant it. "Here I've been tramping half the night over the mud and rocks of a country road to get to a telephone, thinking you'd be frightened out of your senses, and then spent hours trundling into the city behind a skeleton of a country horse that was only fit for a bone-mill, and I find you calmly asleep! And you wake up to ask me whether I've had a good *time!*"

"But I could n't have done you any good by keeping awake, dear, — could I?" Martha asked — oh, so reasonably, so patiently! "And you *did* get home all right, did n't you? Where's Vieva? How's her ankle?"

He had risen, and was standing in the middle of the floor with his hands in his pockets, glaring at her. It was hard for her not to smile: how well she had understood him! He had expected her tears or her reproaches, and fortified himself against the one with tenderness and remorse, and against the other with excuses; and now, finding no necessity for either, he was

forced by her indifference to view his escapade, as he had expected her to see it, shorn of all excuses with which he could so well have covered it and bedecked it and ennobled it, had she but given him the chance! And Martha, so innocently, so sleepily looking at him, knew this perfectly well.

"Vieva all right?" she asked, smothering a wee little yawn.

"All *right?* I've had to carry that girl for *miles.* And she's about cried her eyes out — missing that dinner and all! And she's *starved!*"

"Well, don't say it as though it were *my* fault, Bert darling! Could n't you get her anything to eat?"

"She did n't want to eat. Neither did I."

How dignified he was!

"Oh, you *must* be hungry, then! Do go down and rummage out something nice! And send Vieva up here for some petting — you can bring up a tray."

He had started for the door, but he turned — and the look he gave her from the threshold was a wonderful thing to see!

"I've had about all I can stand of Vieva," said he. "I don't *want* her up here!"

"Oh, all right, darling!" said Martha meekly. "Just as you like! Only give her my love —"

He was stalking down the hall. Martha waited until she heard him speak to Vieva and go off toward the pantry; then she lay down and covered her head with her pillow. It was silly to let herself be so hysterical — she did not want him to know that she laughed — but oh, but oh!

And she did hope Sophy would find the bread and the left-overs in the morning! For she had put them in the cold oven — the only things left in the ice-box were the butter and a pail of lard!

XV

MARTHA took her place behind the coffee-things at the breakfast-table the next morning before any one else was down. She had risen early enough to dress carefully; to-day there was no crumpled blouse in evidence, nor even her usual tailored skirt; instead, she had resurrected a pale-blue linen of last summer — and it had always been particularly becoming. She had, moreover, risen in time to order an unusually good breakfast. She left the doors of the kitchen and pantry ajar, so that the appetizing fragrance of it might ascend, although it was one of her firmest rules that they should always be closed, lest the odor of cooking penetrate to the rest of the house; but there had been a lecture at the Woman's Club the winter before upon the influence of odor and color upon the nervous system. . . . Then she went up to Vieva's room to see how the ankle was, and found that there was only a twist — still painful, but able to be walked on.

Yet in spite of the enticing fragrance wafted upwards, the little girls were well past the oatmeal stage of breakfast before Bert appeared; and when he did so it was with the forbidding, downcast look of a very hungry man who has — one may say — given himself in shaving one of those persistent little cuts which will not yield to treatment. His eyes would not meet Martha's smiling ones, and although he replied to his family's good-morning in kind, he opened his paper at the financial page, propped it up in front of him, and retired from further conversation. Even when Vieva came in, limping a little, with eyes equally downcast, he did not look up, but contented himself with a short —

"'Morning."

Martha tried to make up for her spouse's distraction by being unusually chatty; she and the children found a great deal to say, but it was perfectly obvious that Vieva had lately been weeping. The little girls watched her bent head and tremulous lips as though fascinated; and even Bobby, when his mother demanded a kiss as the price of letting him leave the table, declared, —

"No! Not got any made for you! Got one for Vieva — poor Vieva!"

After breakfast Vieva went directly up to her room, and the rest of the family dispersed in their usual ways; Bert went off without kissing her good-bye, but that seemed rather to amuse Martha than otherwise. He had not said one unnecessary word to any one, and had been as oblivious of them all as though he were having breakfast at a railroad lunch-counter and they were other travelers of destinations unknown, meeting once with the common object of feeding themselves, then departing never in all probability to meet again. Martha knew that he had plenty to think about, and was trying to think of everything else; and for a moment she was quite content to bear the burden of his displeasure. At last she perfectly understood the working of his mind. Her unconcern of the night had changed the episode of the evening from a marital indiscretion, a rather naughty little escapade, into nothing more interesting than a very long walk and a very long wait and some hours of healthy hunger. Oh, she was quite content with Bert's state of mind!

She went up to her room with leisurely step, slightly smiling, humming a little tune — and it had been weeks since she had thus unconsciously hummed. She paused for a moment in the middle of her room, then opened the door of her closet and slowly and pensively took down and inspected a couple of pale-hued frocks that hung there; but she shook her head, put them back and crossed the room to her desk. There for a while she sat tapping her teeth with a pencil; gradually a satisfied expression came into her face and she wrote out a menu which, when she presently took it downstairs to the kitchen, caused both Sophy and Nelly to stare at her with as much astonishment as their well-trained countenances dared to display; and her orders to the tradespeople brought to their tones as transmitted by the telephone that unctuous briskness which signifies a generous total on the day's sales-slips. Finally, with a quick step and a look on her face which showed that she was well satisfied with herself or with something of which she was thinking, Martha dressed herself carefully and smartly for the street, and set out in the direction of Ann Brookes's.

Ann met her on the stairs with the look with which one meets a dear friend's calamity. Martha laughed.

"It's all right, Nance," she said. "That is, if you can help me make my peace with Grace!"

"Oh, Grace!" said Grace's mother, and dismissed the very idea of a daughter who could not be made reasonable. Then, when she had led Martha into her bedroom and closed the door, she said: "Oh, my dear, I have been afraid to look at the morning papers! What happened? — for you would n't be here if either of them had been hurt!"

"Ann! How did you know?"

"Rodney saw that girl spinning out toward the hills in Andrew Frothingham's car, and a man with her. He was not sure —"

Ann paused, looked vaguely out of the window, and Martha flushed. "I love you, Ann," said she. "Let's be frank!"

Mrs. Brookes turned with a relieved look upon her face. "Oh, my dear, I *want* to be frank! I have been wanting to for weeks! But you know, even though you are almost young

enough to be my daughter, Mats, I could n't say — I could *not* say —"

"You could n't come out and say that my husband was flirting with another woman — and she my guest!"

Ann looked even more relieved. "I was n't sure how much you saw," she said apologetically, touching Martha's arm.

Martha laughed outright, although her brows had involuntarily drawn together. "I saw that old, *old* Andrew Frothingham, and nice middle-aged — yes, he is, Ann! — Robert Ramsay, and old-enough-to-know-better Mr. Poet Martin, and charming young Rodney Brookes, and even Baby Bobs Ramsay were behaving as men always have behaved and always will behave over a very pretty face! That's what I saw, my dear!"

Ann watched her for a moment; it was always a source of wonder, the amount Ann could say by her silence. When she spoke it was as though she were summing up a long sentence. "And just because he does n't know it, my Rodney is breaking his heart!"

"You mean he ought to know that it can

only be serious with Vieva toward one of them?"

"Yes — and *don't* you think Rodney is the sort of a big goose that a woman ought to take quite seriously?"

"I suspect that she does take him seriously, Nance."

"I wish I could make my poor boy think so. He's so horribly jealous —" Ann paused, bit off her words, as it were.

Martha mentally gathered herself together, called up all her courage, for this was the thing of all others that she most wanted to know — and the thing of all others that it was difficult to put into words. "Jealous of — of young Martin, or of — of — some one else?"

Ann Brookes hesitated, then spoke all the more rapidly, as though aware that her hesitation would say more than mere words. "My Rodney is a dear, good boy, Mats, — but sometimes even the *best* of men are — are so odious!"

Martha winced ever so slightly, arose, and walked to a window. Then it was true — that which she had feared most! People had no-

ticed, people must be talking! If Rodney was openly jealous of Bert . . . Oh, what *right* had Bert . . . How was she, Martha, ever again to face people, how was she to hold her head as proudly erect as ever, as proudly as when her heart held that proudest consciousness that a woman may know, the consciousness that she is of those happy ones who are beloved and dearly treasured above all else — cherished, according to the good old word of the marriage service? She knew her Robert; of course she knew him; but did their world know him? Was it not, rather, that their world, instead of believing in his whole-souled allegiance to herself, was suspecting, whispering, perhaps even cynically affirming, that the marriage of the Robert Ramsays was turning out like so many others? Even those women who loved to follow her leadership, who applauded her and apparently admired and sought to emulate her — were they thinking, behind their masks of smiles, that she was not the happy creature she seemed, that her poise was no more than well-learned courage, that life was all the while playing her a treacherous trick, or that she herself had some-

how failed toward life's responsibility and so was reaping . . .? Ah! Could people be thinking that of her, of her who had tried to fit each interest in with all the others so that none should be slighted, who had believed — howbeit with occasional questionings of late — that although she did so much in the world outside, at least her home and those within it suffered not at all in consequence? And if people were thinking otherwise about all this, could it, oh, could it somehow be as they thought?

Martha's hand went to her throat. Ann Brookes, watching her, knew that she was suffering. But Ann was wise and kind; she waited, quiet and silent. Even had it been her own Grace there by the window, Ann would have waited; only the night before had Martha Ramsay learned that many of life's crises can be met and endured and won through only by waiting; but Ann Brookes had learned the lesson years before.

And, truly enough, the moment was a moment of crisis for Martha, and of crisis far more meaningful than those long dull hours of the night. Then she had recognized herself as one

of all women, perforce enduring as other women had endured, a wife who must hold fast to patience and love and duty, or else experience utter shipwreck. Now she was asking herself whether she was not, rather, one who had held love in light esteem, or at most regarded it as a familiar jewel needing little care; whether it was herself who had had most need of patience; whether she had not for months and years been putting a lesser duty — a complication of lesser duties — before the one which mattered most and which was so immeasurably the dearest. She thought of Bert's innumerable dull evenings at home — oh, never complained of, even enjoyed for lack of the more enjoyable, yet which were, nevertheless, as so many little waves drifting him unconsciously and all too soon toward the indolence of middle-age; and there was a quick pain at her heart as she realized that it would be her own unnecessary fatigue which would have made him middle-aged before his time. She thought of Bobs, her baby, and remembered that he had cried for Hedwig, his nurse, and not for his mother, that last time he had had the croup. She remem-

bered little gentle Ruth, and Cecily — Cecily the inquisitive, Cecily the intense. She had been going through with the assumed duties outside of her home serene in the belief that all was right with those she loved best and in her faith in her own capability of doing all things and doing them well. She had even, at times, rather scorned the quiet, stay-at-home type of woman, like Mrs. Abercrombie and her Cousin Esther Marshall; she had even been apt to think rather critically of those who, like Mrs. Hiram A. Ward and Mrs. Jack Prentice, concerned themselves only with one or two chosen charities or social undertakings. But now — oh, now she was finding herself forced, in fairness, to ask: What, in reality, had she herself been doing? Was it Bert who was to blame, Bert who had, really, been the cause of her suffering and perhaps of her ignominy, if, indeed, it were true that people were whispering and suspecting and judging her? Or did the cause lie within herself? She had believed herself to be doing so much, so largely meeting life's responsibilities and so generously responding to the calls of the new broad citizen-

ship which to-day was needing and calling and using the women who but yesterday knew nothing beyond their nurseries and their dinner tables and dancing and pretty frocks and bridge. She had thought herself — oh, yes, she had, and not any too humbly, either! — she had thought herself rather a good exponent of the newer freedom of women, one who could wear the dear bonds of wifehood and motherhood and yet be free.

Presently, when she turned and looked at Ann, her cheeks were crimson and her lips tremulous; but there was a dancing light in her eyes.

"Nance," she said, "you heard my 'New Eve' speech, did n't you? Do you remember it at all?"

Ann smiled. "There was something about our being untrammeled by the old bonds, and standing before the supreme court of our own judgment, was n't there?" she asked, with a whimsical twist of the lips.

"There was," said Martha; and for a long moment the two friends looked at each other. Then suddenly they both began to laugh, and laughed until the room rang with merriment.

It was fully an hour thereafter that Martha left Ann Brookes's; and when she slowly and somewhat thoughtfully descended the front steps the merest shadow of an inscrutable little smile was indenting the corners of her lips.

She proceeded southward until she reached the superbly simple structure which housed a great department store, and on its third floor she spent the remainder of the morning. Then she made her way to a little shop on a side street, in which there was a tea-room on the first floor and a "beauty-parlor" on the floor above. She spent fifteen minutes in the tea-room; it was quite three hours later when the elevator brought her from the realms of beauty-culture.

Hedwig, all excitement, heard her on the stairs and came hastily from the nursery.

"Oh, Missis Ramsay," she said, "de ladies from de Suffries have telephon' you all day, five, six time. An' a boy come wid big boxes from de store, an' Mr. Froteenham he been to de door twice and he telephon' and telephon' for Miss Vieva, and Miss Vieva she seek wid her head all day an' —"

"Very well, Hedwig, — it's quite all right! If any one telephones again, just say that you do not know where I am at the moment. Do *not* say that I have returned. And turn on a hot bath for me, will you?"

Hedwig became again her habitual stolid self; the day's proceedings had been unusual and consequently odd; but things were apt to be odd in this so odd country, and Mrs. Ramsay doubtless knew that it was all right, since she said so! It was not for Hedwig to question!

Martha passed on into her bedroom, and found her younger daughter lifting up the lids of certain boxes that were on the bed, and peeping into them. Cecily wore a rather guilty air when her mother stood still and looked at her, but made a brave effort to pass it off with nonchalance.

"I was just waiting for you, mummy!" said she.

"Cecily," said Martha, in a tone Cecily rarely heard, "you understood that those were not *your* boxes you were looking into, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes!" said Cecily airily. "Oh, yes!

They are *your* boxes, mummy! I love your things so — I just love to touch them!"

"And to peep at them!"

Cecily seemed to become aware of the maternal displeasure, and was silent for a moment; then she evidently thought it best to change the subject.

"Vieva has come out of her room and listened over the banisters every single time the telephone rang this whole afternoon, and then she went into her room again and cried and cried. Nelly says her cousin used to cry and cry when her beau got married to the rich pool-parlor man's daughter."

Martha looked at her child. Cecily's face was as sweet and guileless as a pictured angel's, but Martha had no desire to look upon it any more just at that time. Ordinarily she would have made a pretty excuse, or a nice little instructive excuse, to get the child out of the room; at the utmost she would have sent her on a useful errand. Now, however, with what seemed like one swift movement, she took Cecily by the shoulders and set her — yes, set her, deposited her, left her — out in the hall

and shut her bedroom door. She even turned the key with a decided click. There was utter silence outside for a moment; then Martha heard light, slow, reluctant footsteps passing down the hall toward the nursery. Again, as many times before on that momentous day, Martha smiled; then she turned toward the boxes and parcels on the bed.

But the ensuing evening was not altogether the soothing, quietly domestic one that Martha had planned so carefully. She had meant it to be like one of their old ones, with herself on one side of the reading-lamp and Robert on the other, not talking much, perhaps, but none the less companionably aware of each other. She had meant it to be a preface, as it were. Perhaps her conscience smote her a little at the thought of what Bert's feelings must have been on the night before when he had found that empty ice-box; perhaps she merely wanted for them both a little pause, a taking-up again of the old quiet routine, a little test of whether or not it would be possible for them, after these past weeks and all that they had hold, to sink back again into old ways and old ruts. Yet her

plan was vague, scarcely more than instinctive, and she soon found that she could not quite reckon upon her Robert.

He came up the stairs and along the hall rather heavily; she opened the door, spoke quite as though there had been no night before, no kissless departure in the morning, and nonchalantly crossed the floor to her dressing-table. She was wearing a dress of some soft fabric that embraced her curved waist and pretty shoulders and fell in soft folds about her; yet for all its shimmering newness there was something about it which marked it unmistakably as meant for the easy comfort of home: and for years Martha's accustomed home attire had been either a tailored skirt and blouse or some afternoon gown which was no longer fresh enough or sufficiently in the fashion to be worn elsewhere. Bert, invariably observant of the details of her appearance and eager to approve anything she wore or did or said, had loyally tried to admire what was not admirable, or had made excuses for her in his heart — perhaps felt all the more tenderly toward her because excuses were necessary. To-night, therefore,

in spite of the personal preoccupation of his mood, he noticed the new gown before he had come five feet into the room; and Martha, watching his reflection in the mirror, knew that he noticed it.

"Hello, dear!" she said cheerfully. "So glad you're home earlier than usual. Hurry up — I've ordered dinner a little ahead of time — I know you are tired."

He was *not* earlier than usual. He had consciously delayed, he had *wanted* to be late, he had wanted to be quite conspicuously late, as a man tries to be — and surely has a right to try to be — when an unpleasant scene awaits him at home. He had been telling himself all day that Martha's lightness did not deceive *him:* she might pretend not to care about the affair of last night, but it was mere pretense; her apparent nonchalance was only her way of postponing the moment of reckoning. He had known her, before this, to wait until the first moment of anger was past, before trusting herself to speak of a thing which had displeased her. Not often — no; yet he *had* known of her doing that; and of course she was doing it now!

So he waited downtown until he thought she would surely be out of their rooms; and now he had come home quite late, only to be informed that he was early! She had not so much as noticed his lateness! And she was not merely ignoring the affair of last night: apparently she had not given it a thought! And he — he, Robert — had been able to think of little else all day! It had been a dead-and-alive sort of day at the office, anyway, and he ached in every muscle from the long, unaccustomed walk of the night before; he had not had sleep enough, and — and he was uneasily conscious of having made something of a fool of himself, and not only last night, either! No man living could be in such a mood as that and not wish to put the blame on some one; the habit of the scapegoat has persisted through uncounted generations of men. And now here was Martha, apparently—

"Ruth wants you to explain an arithmetic problem to her. Better do it before you come down — I want her to get to bed early," Martha was saying.

Then she took a cheerful way out of the room; he heard her mount the stairs toward Vieva's

door, and stood for a moment or two in the middle of the floor, his fists inelegantly on his hips, looking at the door which she had closed behind her. Then he expressed himself as to what he would be, and went into his dressing-room.

Now you could n't tell *him*, he silently asserted, that Martha was as calm as she was pretending to be. She had not deceived him last night, with her abnormal sleepiness and good-humor and unheard-of lack of anxiety; and she was not deceiving him to-day, with her utter ignoring of an episode that — well, that no self-respecting wife *ought* to ignore. Yes, that was it; it really was n't like Martha, it was n't what he expected of her, that she should, by ignoring the affair of last night, apparently acquiesce in it, accept it as quite all right. It was n't all right, by Jove — at least it would n't have been for any one else, or if it had not been brought about by one of those happenings that cannot be foreseen. He had expected Martha to have higher standards of what was "done." He was disappointed in her — even a little shocked at her!

And having reached that conclusion, he wore an air of still deeper reserve at dinner, an air which was not lightened when Martha remained persistently and ever so pleasantly unobservant of it. Their tête-à-tête — for Vieva was not down — was one of easy, cheerful talk on Martha's part and of monosyllables on his. After Martha's first remark, he told himself, anything more than monosyllables from him would have been dangerous.

"That poor child has been completely used up all day," she said. "Her ankle is stiff, and she has a raging headache. You really ought to take better care of Vieva when you're out with her, honey."

That — that was what Martha said! Bert looked at her; he chose the part of wisdom and was silent. The only thing he could have brought himself to reply to that would have been complimentary neither to Vieva nor — more important — to his wife. As if *he* had made the machine break down! As if *he* — Oh, nothing but silence was possible!

Not even the marked excellence of the dinner lightened his mood, although assuredly it com-

forted him, including, as it did, no less than five of the viands he liked best. As they left the dining-room Martha ran upstairs to make sure that Ruth had put away her books and gone to bed, and that Vieva had drunk her tea and eaten her toast. When she came down again Bert was apparently oblivious of all else than his cigar and his favorite weekly; and yet, when Martha had found the work-bag which she had scarcely opened all winter, and had seated herself in her old, accustomed chair on the side of the table opposite Bert's, she glanced across at his absorbed face more than once during the evening, and smiled.

XVI

For a fortnight thereafter Robert Ramsay was in a most peculiar mood. Hitherto he had found Vieva's company both interesting and enlivening; now, when Martha was so persistently making every opportunity for them to be alone together, Bert was not only bored but annoyed. On that afternoon before Grace Atkinson's little dinner-party, he had started off with Vieva in an unusually good humor. After a good day's work it was not so bad to take a drive with a pretty girl in somebody else's car, not so bad to forget one's married state for a few innocent hours, to be the recipient of fleeting upward glances and to roll past grimly jealous young men on street corners — not so bad! But although for a while after Rodney flung them that furious look, Vieva had talked more gayly than ever, she very soon fell into a silence which he somehow felt to be unhappy. And evidently her unhappiness increased. By the time they thought of turning

homeward she could find only monosyllables — not an enlivening sort of conversation at any time; and when they finally had to admit that they had lost their way in trying to cut across country, she was in tears. No man can endure a woman's tears unless they yield to his own comforting; and Vieva made it perfectly unmistakable that she wanted no comforting of his! Then, after a couple of hours of anxious wandering, the car had broken down; and before they had walked half a mile in search of help and a telephone Vieva had twisted her ankle, and informed him between sobs that she hated him, and that Rodney would never forgive her for going motoring with him and not getting back in time for Mrs. Atkinson's dinner. And after all that, Bert had had to help her, almost carry her, for miles — long and dark and hungry miles; and Vieva was not such a featherweight, either; her young slenderness was deceptive.

The next day he had had to send out for Andrew's confounded runabout, and since he had been responsible for the breakdown — he had even been driving at the time — of course he had to stand for the repairs; the car was of a

most expensive make, and its parts were costly, and Martha twitted him — *openly* twitted him — on his driving, and without saying anything to him about it she had their own little old car cleaned up so that he could take Vieva out in it — Jove! Take Vieva out again? Not if he knew it! And in that car! Why, with what the repairs of Andrew's runabout cost him and a little more added, he could have bought a new one. And yet he did take Vieva out again, and more than once; had to, because Martha openly arranged it for them, and there was no getting out of it; and he had to listen to Vieva's chatter, which was so inordinately *young*. Funny how much younger she seemed now than she had such a short while earlier!

And that was not all. Martha had planned a little mid-Lenten dance for Vieva; it was just an intimate little affair of a dozen couples. Young Brookes excused himself a few days before the dance on the plea of absence from the city, and that left them with one man too few. He should have thought that Martha would have invited a few extra men, anyway; he did n't know what she meant when she said she did

not want to make it "that sort" of a dance. Rodney's absence made it impossible, therefore, for Bert to hide himself away; and Martha went about asking the girls to save dances for him — oh, he did not *hear* her doing it, of course, but just the same he knew she did. Yet, oddly enough, — or carelessly enough, — she had invited their guests in pairs, as it were, each Jack with his chosen Jill, or his would-to-the-god-of-lovers-that-she-were-chosen Jill; and the result was that when the maidens danced with their host they were singularly abstracted — and that was interesting for a man, now, was n't it?

It was not like Martha to be so undiscerning. Of course he could not *tell* her how he felt about Vieva. For one thing, it would be disloyal to the girl, and she was a nice little thing, and he was really very fond of her; she was Genevieve's daughter, and all that! And for another thing, he was not in a confidential mood. In fact, he was not overly anxious to invite any private conversations at all with Martha, just at present. He was not pleased with Martha. She was not like herself — not at all.

And yet he could not for the life of him discover wherein the difference lay. She was cheerful and happy, apparently, — yes, quite surely she was happy. She was affectionate, and always looking out for his comfort — more than need be, indeed, for he could perfectly well amuse himself: he did not need to have Vieva eternally and forever thrust upon him. He really could not have decided whether Martha was the more attentive to Vieva or to himself. Apparently she was always thinking up something that was meant to give pleasure to one or the other of them. To be sure, she seemed to be at home rather more than usual, but of course that was not what made the subtle difference in her. Not since the earliest days of their marriage had he been so acutely aware of her. For years she had been such an intimate part of his own consciousness, as much a part of him, he would have said, as his own breath; now she had suddenly, and as far as he could discover quite unreasonably, developed a personality apart from his. It was deucedly queer of Martha. It was disconcerting. And it was increasingly tantalizing.

Then came the evening of the Wards' dinner, when for the first time he saw her, as it were, as with the eyes of other men — saw Mrs. Robert Livingston Ramsay, the clever, the brilliant, the leader, the maker of public opinion, and not merely his Martha. It was a memorable evening for Bert, and its wonderment began when he came home and opened the door of their room. Martha was standing before her long mirror, but as he entered she turned, crossed the room swiftly toward him, and raised her face for his kiss.

"Hurry up, old man," she said. "Carey has telephoned that they are having dinner half an hour early. The Governor is to be there, you know, and he has to get back to the Capital to-night. I've put out your things for you!"

But it was not her casual mention of the Governor nor her little attention of having put out his "things" for him that held him standing there. Martha had gone to her dressing-table as she spoke and had seated herself: lately she had been in the habit of standing; she was adding a comb set with brilliants to the side of

her elaborate and exceedingly becoming coiffure. Her uplifted arms were bare to the shoulders, and the position was a very graceful one. Her white skin gleamed in a deep V at the back; her gown — Bert had never before seen the gown or the comb — was of velvet, in color so deep a sapphire as to look almost black where it fell in shadow, yet which somehow remained blue, and a blue as intense as Italy's sky of night. It was a wonderful garment, as superb in its simplicity as any glowing jewel; and its curves — but, after all, its curves were only Martha's!

"Whe-e-ew!" said Bert, and his expression was a curious mixture of surprise and pique and admiration. Martha's reflection smiled at him from the mirror; then she stood up, turned a little, and surveyed the back of her marvelous self with the aid of a hand-glass. Every one knows that pose — unconscious and yet purposeful, graceful, alluring.

"Like it?" she asked, as she put the glass down.

Bert grinned. "Pats," he said, "you *are* a wonder!" It was the first time in many days

that she had heard the phrase. "Something new, is n't it?"

"Of course," she laughed; and added, "Do hurry up! We *must* get there before the Governor, you know! No, don't stop me — I've got to run up and see how Vieva looks. She's dining with Grace to-night."

That was the first marvel of the evening; the other came later, when he suddenly and all unexpectedly found himself seeing and hearing his Martha, not as she was to him, but as she was to others. It was a brilliant company about a brilliant table. Hiram Ward, the host, was not only a signally successful business man, but a notable collector, and his house was like a gem set with gems; and Mrs. Ward, many years younger than her husband, was a noted beauty. They could choose their guests from the culture of the country, and to-night there were men and women of nation-wide eminence; Bert, indeed, had an amused moment of consciousness of his own insignificance.

But there was nothing insignificant about Martha. She was seated at the Governor's right; and as Bert watched her across the

beautiful table, she became for him a new Martha whom he had not known before; or, rather, she became to him the Mrs. Robert Ramsay that she was to the rest of her admiring world, and also some one even more wonderful than ever, and of whose dearness in possession he was newly conscious.

His familiar Martha was, with so much else, a person who listened attentively — more or less attentively! — while he propounded his views, who narrated little matters of common interest, and who frequently remained silent for long, indefinite spaces of time filled by that subconscious communion of the spirit which was as dear to them both as any part of their life together. This other Martha was a thinker, an individual who knew how to summon ideas and how to express them. She was a person to whom other men were glad to listen, a person to whom they paid obvious attention and — yes — homage. It had soon become evident that she it was whom the Governor found most interesting, that it was she who could talk most aptly with the famous sculptor opposite, that it was she to whom most deference was paid, and

she who electrically energized the other guests into answering brilliance.

Then, after dinner, Mrs. Ward drew Martha to a place beside herself, and launched the topic of child-labor laws, a subject which was very near the hearts of both of them; but it was Martha, it would seem, who was the persuading or convincing one, for it was to her that the Governor spoke as he was leaving.

"I assure you, Mrs. Ramsay," he said, "that I will do all in my power to have the bill put through at this session."

And Martha had smiled lightly, as though it were quite to be taken for granted that he should do so!

And after the Governor's departure it was Mr. Ward himself who insisted upon sharing her attention with the sculptor; Robert, sitting near, had perforce to remain silent while they discussed things of which he knew nothing, and about which he had never suspected that his Martha knew more than he — a French book or two, some new Belgian poetry, and from that to the question of food-supply for the Belgian children; then, by some quick turn that

he could not follow, they were off from the subject of cartoons to that of cubism, and from cubism it was music and the ultra-moderns, and the probable effect of the war upon musical composition; and long before they had reached the subject of Russian church music, practically all the remaining guests had drawn nearer to that little group of which Martha was the center — yes, Martha, his Martha; for beyond a doubt it was she who was leading this — to Robert — unprecedented display of mental pyrotechnics, as he thought it. Where under Heaven Martha had found time to get herself posted on so many obscurities was beyond *him;* she never talked about all that stuff at home — although he had, quite frequently, found odd books with uninteresting titles on the living-room table, and had wondered who read them. But even so — he had never for a moment supposed that Martha was this kind of a Martha. Talk about these modern women!!

He watched the expressions of the other men. Some looked as bewildered as he felt, but most of them were keen, alert, alive to what Martha and the others were saying; then he looked

again at his amazing wife. He had lost the thread of the talk, lost it in his own wonderment. At this moment one of the men was saying: —

"Tchekhov is right — even a plain woman becomes beautiful when her emotions are stirred deeply enough. Of course the satire of those Russians —"

Now, Martha had never been a plain woman; but to-night — well, to-night she was beautiful and more than beautiful, and Bert knew very well that it was not all due to the splendor of her velvet and the new way of doing her hair. Yet even when, on their way home, — and home lay but a few hundred yards down the hill from Mr. Ward's house, — even when Martha looked sideways at him, with starry eyes and flushed cheeks, and asked, "Well?" — even then he did not quite suspect the reason.

Vieva's arrival and theirs were simultaneous. Vieva's gown was blue, too; but its pale turquoise faded into insignificance beside Martha's sapphire; and this evening not even the girl's charm of youth could outweigh, in Robert's eyes, the greater charm of Martha's matured poise.

"Oh, Cousin Martha!" Vieva cried, "I've had a perfectly wonderful time! Rodney is back — and Grace knew a new step — oh, Cousin Robert, do start the victrola and let me show it to you!"

Martha smiled; so it was "Cousin Robert" again! Then she looked at Bert, and could have laughed aloud at the dismay in his face. But she understood. If there had been any lingering doubt before, there was none now. She had won — Bert did not want to dance — Bert was even disgusted at the sudden reminder that he had ever been willing and anxious to learn a new step at some almost-midnight hour.

Vieva was opening the victrola, but Martha put an arm across her shoulders and drew her toward the stairs.

"You are not going to dance any more tonight, honey, nor Bert either! Come — be thankful for a chance of some beauty-sleep!"

"Yes, that's right," said Bert most cheerfully. "We'll *all* get some beauty-sleep. Not that *you* need it, Pats!"

Martha had supposed that her blushing days were over; she gave him a swift look.

"Of course she does n't!" Vieva was saying, and kissed Martha's cheek and gave a little affectionate pat to the coils of her hair. "She's perfectly gorgeous, is n't she? Yes, you are, Cousin Martha, — and you're just the most wonderful person *I* ever knew, too!"

Martha laughed, and urged the girl up the stairs arm in arm with her; Bert looked after them, wondering again — since this affectionate understanding between the two was to be the final marvel of that day. Of course *he* had always known that Martha was wonderful; but why had Vieva suddenly become so acutely aware of it?

What Bert could not know was that, during the weeks since their breakdown in the hills, Vieva had been having as bad a time of it as he had. On the day after that escapade, Rodney Brookes had welcomed an unexpected offer to make a trip to Alabama on the bank's business, and had departed forthwith, leaving no message for Vieva, neither sending her a note nor calling nor even so much as telephoning a word of farewell. Ann, tender-eyed, helped him pack in spite of his assurances that he would much

rather do it alone; she had not felt such a heart-ache over him since those days of his boyhood when, with youth's inevitable sureness of itself, he had refused to profit by the wisdom and experience of his elders, but had tried out something or other for himself and then had come back to his mother with his bumps and his bruises. Yet Ann believed that the affair of the moment would eventually come out right for him; she knew the power of youth's magnetism for youth, and she trusted Martha. But for the present Rodney must go bruised, and there was nothing she could do to help him; so she insisted upon doing his packing for him, and kept reminding herself that it would be better for him to suffer, since suffer he must, elsewhere than in Hilton, and that, after all, he was only going for three weeks.

But Vieva knew neither the cause of his absence nor its probable duration; she only knew that he had gone away almost immediately after her failure to appear at his sister's dinner; and the last memory she had of him was that furious look he had thrown her as she drove past him with Bert Ramsay in the car beside

her. Whatever her methods and manners with the elder members of the masculine sex, Vieva was not given to undue discrimination between the younger ones. Apparently she smiled on all alike; and yet there was something in her smile which made each swain at times suspect that he was, or would become, the favored one. She wanted every one to like her, and she subtly let them know that she wanted them to; that in itself was sufficiently alluring to most young men, and her unexpected restraints and unexpected impulsiveness completed the conquest of more than young Rodney, to that gentleman's deep and quite undisguised bitterness.

But it would not have been so bad, Rodney told himself, if she had been contented with flirting with chaps his own age; that was fair play, and he stood as good a chance as any of them — unless it were that long-haired idiot, Martin, reeking with money as he was. What Rodney could *not* endure was her being just as charming and seeming to have just as good a time with those *old* guys like Ramsay and old Andy Frothingham. That, by Jove, was *too* much — and more than once he had let Miss

Vieva know that he thought so — and had gone markedly unrewarded for his pains.

All of which Vieva remembered during those weeks of Rodney's unexplained absence, and wept over during nights whose length of sleeplessness she would never before have believed possible. But the climax of Vieva's misery came on an afternoon when Martha, opening the front door with her latch-key, heard excited voices in the living-room. She parted the curtains and beheld, in the fading light of late afternoon, a very pale young woman, shrinking back into one of the big chairs, her hands clasped as if to still their trembling, her lips and her eyes very wide open, indeed, looking at a young man who was standing on the hearth-rug. His face, too, was pale; and his hair was disheveled, as though he had been thrusting excited fingers through it; and the bow of his satin stock was under an ear. His hands were gesticulating wildly, and his voice was hoarse — with emotion, Martha supposed. The two were so absorbed that they were not at first aware of her entrance.

"No!" Mr. Martin was saying, "no! You

cannot trifle with a man's love! It is not possible for you — *you* — to do that! Your heart may be still asleep, but you love me, I know it, I feel it! You would not have looked at me as you have looked, you would not have been so kind, so Heaven-kind, so blessed-sweet, if that were not true! It must be true! It is true! If you tell me again that it is not, life will be over for me — over! I shall not want to live — and I shall not live! You —"

But that was the moment when he saw Martha in the doorway.

When she had sped the departure of the too-ardent poet, Martha looked at Vieva with a smile which she could not restrain; and it was a very frightened and very unhappy and very much chastened Vieva who flung herself into the older woman's arms.

"Oh, Cousin Martha!" Vieva cried. "He's been here for an hour going on like that, and I've had a perfectly horrible time! He said he would k-kill himself if I did n't — if I would n't — Oh, Cousin Martha, you don't think he really *will*, do you?"

"No," said Martha dryly, "I don't think he

really will. I think he is rather old-fashioned, your would-be Lochinvar from out of the west, with his longish hair and his curious neckwear and his — his romantic attitude! But just the same, I'm afraid you've been giving him rather a bad time of it, Vieva child! I can't help feeling just a little bit sorry for the poor young man, in spite of his absurdity!"

Vieva looked shyly pleased. "I did n't think he would be so — so dreadfully in earnest about — about things," she said, with a little smile which, it must be confessed, was also a complacent little smile.

For a moment Martha looked in silence at the pretty bent head and downcast eyes. Again there swept up to her a wave of the feeling toward Vieva that she had so often known during the past months — a sort of faint disdain which bordered on dislike and yet held pity, too. How ultra-feminine the girl was, how little a creature of the new day upon which women were entering! There flashed through her memory a phrase which Ann Brookes had once used: "The sort of woman who will let herself become frowzy a year or so after marriage!"

In Vieva's case it might be the extreme opposite of frowziness: she might be the kind that grows to think only of the external, unessential things; and what a pity! What a pity for this particular girl, if that should come to pass! For there was sweetness in her, and charm — oh, plenty of charm! Would it be worth while to say anything? And would it do any good to speak?

But that was a question which was unworthy! What matter where the seed fell? Surely it was the sower's duty to cast it forth!

"Child," she said, in that quizzical tone which is so effectual with youth, "do you know, I think you are rather old-fashioned, yourself!"

Vieva looked at her, and seemed to be thinking this out. "Why, Cousin Martha?" she asked.

"Oh, you and your flirtations! As if this were 'before the war'!"

Vieva dimpled; she knew all about her flirtations, and secretly she had no objection at all to the number of her conquests. "But I can't help their all — all liking me, Cousin Martha, can I?"

Martha laughed. "Oh, no! I did n't mean that! The man is not born who could help liking you, you funny child! But — it is just a little bit out of date to — well, to think so much about it — or don't you think so?"

Vieva seemed to be thinking this out; it was quite a minute before she spoke again. "But — but *I* don't think men and women will ever stop — stop thinking about each other, Cousin Martha!"

Martha laughed again. "Heaven forbid that they should, Vieva!" she said. "The world would stop for all of us if that ever came to pass! I was only thinking about the way the game is played."

Again Vieva thought it out. "But there are some games that will never be old-fashioned, Cousin Martha! Don't you think so? And I don't believe I'd like it a bit if — if men did n't — did n't —"

"Don't worry about that, my dear! They will — they always will! There's not the slightest doubt of that! The old game will always and forever be the best game. But we are finding new ways of playing it."

Vieva flushed a little, but her eyes did not waver from Martha's, and Martha was conscious of a sudden warmth of affection for her; she really was a little thoroughbred, this daughter of Genevieve's! "I believe you mean that I have n't been — been playing it very — very fairly!" Vieva almost whispered.

Now it was Martha's turn to flush. "Oh, my dear, I don't mean anything half as horrid and preachy," she said. "But things have changed a lot for us women since the last century went out. We have learned a lot, and thank Heaven, we are still learning! And one of the best things we are learning is that women can play the game — any game, all games — and play like — gentlemen!"

How quick the child was to get her meaning! "Oh, Cousin Martha —" she began.

But Martha stopped her. "Remember, I am learning, too, Vieva! I am a long way from having learned my own game yet, my dear."

She got up and went to the window; somehow, she did not want, in that moment of quickened memory and — yes — and self-reproach, to meet the girl's questioning gaze.

And after a moment Vieva echoed, not for the last time, a phrase she had often heard in that house.

"Oh, Cousin Martha," she said, "I think you are perfectly wonderful!"

Now it was Martha's turn to consider; there was a pause, and then she turned and looked toward the girl.

"Why?" she asked.

"You are not a bit like what I thought you were, Cousin Martha! I thought — I thought you were so much interested in — in all your 'things' that — that you could n't be as much interested in — in love, you know, and all that! I thought you were *different;* and you 're not, not a bit! Oh, that sounds horrid! I 'm not saying what I mean, at all! I don't know how to!"

"Yes, you are! I know perfectly what you mean! I do so many other things that you thought I must put them ahead of love — and love, for me, means husband and children and home."

"Oh, I — I —"

"You are quite right, Vieva, in a way! I had not learned the game — I have n't, even yet!

But I know there is a way to play it so that every one — to use an expressive phrase — 'gets a square deal.' There must be."

She turned to the window to look out into the dim twilight, until Vieva spoke again. "Life is n't very much like what I thought it would be!" said she, with a sigh. And at the sheer youthfulness of the remark Martha smiled, and came back into the room to sit beside the girl and put an arm about her.

"Vieva," she said, "life *has* changed, and it is still changing; it began to change on the day when our first grandmother's curiosity got the better of her, and it has kept right on changing every minute since. Only, it has changed rather more suddenly and decidedly of late. I don't mean merely in external things, either — the new citizenship of women, yes, and of men, too, and all that that brings with it! I mean" — she was speaking slowly, as though thinking it out as she went, and as though the words must be chosen with care — "I mean between men and women, too. Love. And marriage. And the way we play the game. I believe that we are standing at the dawn of a new day, where we

are going to be able to fit in all the new duties with all the old ones, and where love and marriage will be held more highly and sacredly than ever before, and be more carefully tended. Women are learning more than they used to dream of about the essential things; they are learning, too, to keep step with men, Vieva; and we are all, men and women alike, waiting for our marching orders, and ready for them as we never were before. And it's a pret-ty poor procession, my dear, which does n't march straight and keep in the middle of the road. Oh," — she laughed, a little apologetically, as though conscious of a flight of oratory, — "oh, the millennium is a long way off, *sans doute:* but it's already to-morrow morning!"

Vieva was looking at her with a rapt admiration, but with understanding, too. "'To-morrow morning'! I — oh, I *like* that, Cousin Martha! But — if it's that, then to-morrow morning is to-day, too, is n't it?"

Martha shook her head, and her face wore one of the expressions which her devoted Josephine found ever puzzling.

"No," said she, whismically, —"no, it will not be to-day until we have forgotten that it is to-morrow—that it is not just a new day dawning, but a present living one in which the new order of things is just a blessed matter of course." Then she laughed, and gave Vieva a little shake as she stood up. "But Heavens, child! We've wandered a long way from your lovelorn poet! And it's time and long past time to dress for dinner!"

To which Vieva replied so quickly and decidedly that Martha laughed aloud, "He is not *my* poet! I don't want him! I don't want any poet at all!"

"Tell that to your Rodney, then, when he comes back from Alabama!" she said; and Vieva flushed hotly and ran upstairs.

XVII

A DAY or two after their dinner at the Wards', Nelly brought upstairs a long florist box, and, smiling with all a maid's proprietary interest, she was carrying it up to Vieva's room, Vieva being at Mr. Frothingham's, when Martha spoke.

"They are for me, I think, Nelly."

For since Rodney's occasional offerings and Thomas Aquinas's daily ones had ceased, the house seemed bare without blossoms, and that morning Martha had stopped at a florist's on the way uptown. Nelly, with a smiling apology, left the box; and Martha had scarcely broken its pink string when Cecily appeared; parcels, letters, even telephone calls and rings at the doorbell were matters of deep and unfailing interest to Cecily, and she always appeared as if by magic when anything arrived. Martha was quite aware of the child's curiosity, but understood it — perhaps sympathized with it.

"Want to help mother arrange some flowers,

Cecily-baby?" she asked, lifting the box to inhale the sweetness of the blossoms.

"Oh!" cried Cecily, clasping her hands with the ecstasy which children feel only for flowers and ice-cream, no matter how familiar those are. "Oh! White lilacs! Oh, won't Vieva just love them!"

Martha laughed, and brushed her hand over Cecily's curls. "Vieva, indeed! These flowers belong to your mother!"

Cecily's eyes grew round. She tripped downstairs ahead of Martha, and watched her fill the largest bowl with pink tulips; she hovered near while Martha placed this on the dining-table, and then arranged the lilacs in a very tall and slender vase on a small table which she set just inside the portière of the living-room.

"That's a very topply vase, mummy," said Cecily.

But her mother's thoughts seemed to be somewhere else; as a matter of fact, Martha was recalling that there had been a day when she had worn white lilacs and Bert for the first time had told her that she was the most beautiful creature in the world. She was wonder-

ing whether the blossoms would remind Bert — but of course they would n't — men never remembered such things!

"It's *very* topply," Cecily warned her again.

"Oh, I think it will do," said she, dreamily.

As they were gathering up the tissue and the bits of leaves Cecily asked, in a tone that was both confidential and insinuating, and also very pleasant, "Mummy, *who* sent you those flowers? Did daddy?"

Of course there was no reason in the world why she should not have told the child, except that it suddenly seemed to her unwise to indulge curiosity too far.

"No, darling, not daddy. Some one who remembers when mother was young and used to wear white lilacs —"

Cecily was looking as much like a serious little owl as a very pretty, very curious little girl may. She watched her mother touch the flowers again and lift them to a better position.

"There! They are lovely, are they not?" asked Martha; and added, "It is almost time for daddy to come home; why don't you stay downstairs and surprise him?"

"Oh, *yes!*" cried Cecily. And Martha went up to the nursery, carrying a spray of blossoms for the children's supper-table. She had a short romp with Bobs, and warned Ruth to put away her book, and was passing through the hall on her way to her own room when she heard the front door slammed, and knew that Bert had come. Thinking to overhear Cecily's greeting, she waited, smiling the tender little smile of the mother whose brood is gathered home for the night. She heard Bert's pause in the hall, and knew that he was taking off his overcoat; she heard him move toward the living-room, heard Cecily's "Booh!" And then a crash.

Then she heard Cecily's reproving words. "Oh, *daddy*, just *look* what you did to mummy's flowers! Oh! Mummy's lo-o-ove-ly flowers! Somebody sent them to mummy, somebody what remembers when she was young, and when she used to wear white lilacs! I guess he must be in love for mummy, 'cause —"

"You go tell Nelly to come clean up this mess!" said Bert sternly, inelegantly. Then he came stalking up the stairs.

Martha fled into her dressing-room, closed

the door, and leaned against it to laugh. Oh, Cecily's blessed little chattering tongue! What must poor old Bert be thinking? But she did n't care! No, she did not care in the least! How often had not she herself been stung by Cecily's innocent revelations? It would n't hurt Bert to feel the sting for once!

At the dinner-table that evening Vieva exclaimed over the great bowl of tulips.

"How perfectly beautiful, Cousin Martha! And so wonderful to see them this early! Oh, and you have some lilacs, too!"

Bert suddenly reached for his glass of water and emptied it; Martha smiled ever so faintly, as one smiles at the memory of some sweet thing gone by.

"Yes," she murmured dreamily; "they always make me think of — of a time long ago — "

Her voice trailed off into silence, and thereafter she remained pensive, wistful, speaking only in monosyllables throughout a rather silent meal; but she had to keep her eyes veiled to hide the mischievous twinkle in them, and felt a little inward quiver of amusement as she

told herself that some of the old ways of playing the old game were still very effective!

But the climax of it all came, for Robert, on the Saturday afternoon when he came home to luncheon with a big bunch of violets in his hand and a couple of matinée tickets in his waistcoat pocket. At the breakfast-table that morning he had casually asked what everybody was going to do that day. The little girls joyously announced that they were going to the Museum with Ruth's teacher. Vieva was going to spend the afternoon with Uncle Andrew — she flushed a little as she said it, but lately she had a curious way of blushing for no apparent reason, so no one remarked upon it. Bert himself announced that his own plans were undecided, and looked rather injured because no one seemed particularly interested; Martha, who was in one of her bubbling moods and was flirting desperately with her son, said, when urged, that she really did not know what the day would bring forth, and asked why any one should bother! The unexpected was always the best, anyway!

And on this fateful day it was the unexpected which did happen, apparently; for when

Bert came home toward one o'clock, and called Martha's name as soon as he had closed the door, it was only Cecily who came down to meet him, holding on to the banister and half sliding, half hopping downwards step by step, in one of those silly, childish methods of progress which are often, for some unaccountable reason, so provoking to grown-ups.

"I did n't like that old Museum one bit, daddy! It was n't a bit like the Zoo, and there were a lot of marble people all undressed, and I did n't find it interesting. Oh, daddy, what pretty violets! Just like Vieva's!"

"Don't say 'one bit'; say 'at all,'" her father admonished her. Then he asked, "Where's your mother?"

Cecily's lip began to tremble. "She's gone up in an aeroplane," said she.

Robert felt as though a cold hand had touched his heart. "*What?*" he cried. "What's that?"

Cecily's eyes were brimming with tears. "Yes, she has. With Miss Wendell and Katharine Ward's mother. And nobody ever, *ever* takes *me* along when it's anything nice! You don't your*self*, daddy!"

Martha! His Martha! In an aeroplane!

Of course he knew — had good reason to know — that the modern woman dares a good deal — anything, in fact; but — Martha! To risk her life in that way! His wife, the mother of his little children! He had a swift vision of them, motherless . . . Suddenly he felt ill, faint.

He marched back to the pantry. "Nelly," he demanded, "is Mrs. Ramsay coming home to lunch?"

Nelly looked startled. There were no preparations under way for the meal, as far as he could see; apparently they had not expected him home, either! Usually Martha provided some little delicacy for his Saturday luncheons, so as to make a party of his half-holiday.

"Oh, no, sir, Mr. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay told me to say, if you should get home before she did, sir, that she and Miss Wendell and Mrs. Ward had been telephoned for, and had to make a flying trip to the Capital, sir, and she hoped she would n't be very late, and if she was we was n't to wait dinner for her, sir." Then, as Mr. Ramsay neither spoke nor moved, and

had a most unusual look on the face of him, she asked, "Will I get you some lunch, sir? Eggs, or something?"

Eggs!

"No, I thank you, Nelly," said he, and walked out of the pantry.

So that explained Cecily's aeroplane idea! A flying trip — he laughed, but grimly, without the slightest trace of humor. Of course it was a relief to know that Martha had *not* done anything so madly dangerous; but she was potentially capable of doing it! Oh, yes, she was! It was just coming to the place where he did n't know *what* Martha would do! And why should she wear herself all out with all these junketings to the Capital, and all such stuff, anyway? Let somebody else do it, that was what *he* said!

He went into the living-room, took the tickets for the matinée — and it was a Shaw play that he had been sure Martha would enjoy, though he had an idea it would be rather high-brow for himself! — took the tickets out of his waistcoat pocket and without so much as opening the little containing envelope he threw them upon the fire. The violets he left in the hall, on a

table near the radiator; he hoped she would find them wilted — yes, *wilted*. Then he went upstairs and lay down on the bed. He thought of going to his club; but the club was a comfortable place, and other men would be there with their cheerful talk, and he did not *want* to be either cheerful or comfortable. It was not that Martha had not been at home to receive him and his little surprise — he was not so childish as to mind that! Nor was it in the least that he wished to curtail her pleasure, or to keep her from doing anything — yes, anything — that she wanted to do. No, it was not that; but he *wanted* Martha — he wanted one of their old chummy afternoons together — he wanted the dearness of her presence — he wanted *her*.

Notwithstanding her warning to Nelly, however, Martha was not late in returning. Robert heard Mrs. Ward's big car stop in front of the door, and closed his eyes. A minute or two later his Martha was bending over him.

"Why, darling! Are you sick? Does your head ache?" she was asking solicitously, tenderly smoothing the tousled hair back from his forehead.

"I am perfectly well, perfectly," said Robert.

"Have you been home long?" Her voice was sympathetic, tender.

"I have been at home all the afternoon."

"Oh! O-o-oh! You poor old dear! Do you know, I forgot all about its being Saturday until just a little while ago! The Governor telephoned Carey Ward early this morning — we had luncheon at the Mansion — and the bill will surely go through — but if I'd remembered your holiday, dear, I'd have telephoned or something! I'm so sorry!"

Telephoned or something!

"You were n't lonely, were you, Bert dear? Where's Vieva?"

That he ignored. "You said nothing to *me* about going to the Capital to-day!" he said, very stiffly.

"But I've just told you — it was *quite* unexpected! And really, Bert darling! When did we ever ask each other's permission for anything we had to do?" She was so gay, so reasonable! "Come! Make yourself look your prettiest! I'm awfully glad your head does n't ache! Kate has a box for the Shaw play to-night and

we're all going! The man who plays Brassbound is an old friend of Kate's —"

Robert stood up and rested his hands — ungracefully enough, yet with an effect! — upon his hips. "I'll be damned if I'm going," said he, "or you, either!"

Martha looked at him. Gradually, as she looked, her expression changed from one of utter surprise to one of satisfactory meekness.

"Oh, very well, dear," said she. "I *am* a little tired!"

"I'm sorry you're tired," said he, "but you're not too tired to come with me to Chicago to-night!"

Still his Martha looked at him; but now there was a very great difference in her look. It was as though she were beholding some strange man, suddenly standing there in the middle of her bedroom floor. Her lips parted a little, as a child's lips part when it is watching some new marvel.

"I am due in Chicago at that Board meeting Monday noon. I was n't going until to-morrow. But I have decided to go to-night and *take you with me*."

For a moment longer she looked at him in silence. Then she drew a quick, sharp breath. "Bert! You *are* sick! Are you feverish?"

They watched each other, look for look. Then gradually there stole over Bert's face a smile — oh, very faintly at first, then growing until it was quite a presentable grin; and before she knew it he had crossed the room and had her in his arms.

"Stop acting!" he said, holding her close, kissing her hair and her neck. "And stop teasing! You know there's nothing the matter with me, except that I want my wife! I want you all to myself. I want to take you away with me, to carry you off, away from everything, away from the children, away from Vieva, away from — from everything and everybody. I just want to go honeymooning! Will you come?"

She laughed, but there were tears in her eyes. "But, Bert! To-night? How —"

He kept her close to him with one arm while he took out his watch. "It is n't half-past six yet! We'll take the nine o'clock! You could pack for Alaska in that time! Pats! Look up at me! Will you come?"

She looked up at him, laughing, but rather tremulously. "I ought not to leave the children," she said, "and —"

"Nonsense! What could happen to the children?"

"And Vieva! I can't leave a young girl alone —"

"I'll telephone Ann Brookes while you're dressing, and ask her to invite Vieva there until we come back. Pats! Be a good sport! Come and elope with your husband!" he said in her ear.

"Well — if you'll send Nelly up to help me —"

He gave her a final vigorous hug and went off to the telephone.

Martha's first request of Nelly was that she should ask Miss Vieva to come into her room as soon as she was dressed for dinner; but Miss Vieva, it seemed, had not come home, but had sent a note by Johnson, Mr. Frothingham's chauffeur. It was too bad, thought Martha, that she would not be able to explain to the child in person; she dropped the note into her little handbag — there was no time to read it now, what with her packing, and the farewells

to the tots, and dinner; and she must snatch a moment to telephone to Josephine. That telephone conversation was, as it happened, the most cheering part of her preparations; many times during the days that followed she recalled Josephine's voice and words with little inward quivers of amusement; but all that Bert heard, as he moved back and forth, busy with his preparations, did not seem to him either amusing or startling.

"Josephine," Martha was saying, "that you? Josephine, I am going to Chicago to-night. No, not to the Capital — I went there this afternoon. Chicago . . . No, not about any business at all . . . Just for a lark, with my husband. My husband, yes!" Martha laughed. "Josephine, I am sorry, but I have n't time for explanations, and I might explain all night and you 'd never — No, truly! No! . . . Will you please ask Miss Wendell to look after things for me . . . What? No, of course not! I never was so sane in all my life!" There was a pause, and then Martha laughed. "Oh, don't you worry, Josephine! I'm not going to desert *anything*. But I *am* going to keep things in their places!

What? Yes, that's what I said — I am going to keep things in their places! . . . What? Oh, nonsense! Of course they can! They'll just have to. 'Bye, Josephine!"

Then, at last, all that she had to do was accomplished, and at last she and Bert were alone in the compartment on the moving train, and Bert was making himself comfortable in the seat across from hers, with the relaxation of the man who knows he is on a train for twelve hours more. He offered her one of the evening papers — it had apparently seemed an appropriate beginning of the journey to buy half a dozen.

But Martha preferred to sit quietly. She could see him, was vividly aware of him, without looking directly at him; and it was good to be together like this — amusing, the way he had swept her off, but dear and delightful none the less. She could think, now, of all the past months, from the day Vieva came until this afternoon. Vieva! That reminded her — she had not yet opened the child's note. She was probably dining with Uncle Andrew; in that case Helen —

She opened her handbag, took out the note; it was rather long. After the first sentence or two she exclaimed and sat up straighter.

"What's the matter?" Bert asked, holding his paper a little to one side and looking around it..

Martha glanced quickly over the letter, and in a moment she handed it to him. "Read that!" she said. "Read it aloud!"

And Bert read:—

Dear Cousin Martha, —

I hope you will forgive me, and I'm awfully sorry for mamma, because she was n't present. But Uncle Andrew says people always forgive these things in time. He arranged it all, and he says he has n't enjoyed himself so much in years and years. He just insisted on our doing it this way.

I don't know how to break it to you, Cousin Martha, except just to write it right out. I am married to Rodney. Uncle Andrew motored us over to Bridgton this afternoon, and he and Johnson were the witnesses. I never was so happy in my life.

You have been perfectly wonderful to me this winter, Cousin Martha, and so has Cousin Robert, and I can never thank you both enough. I do hope you will forgive me.

Lovingly,

VIEVA.

P.S. Uncle Andrew is going to build us a house for a wedding-present, right on the corner of his grounds, and has given me a perfectly wonderful check, and he is going to have Rodney made a partner in the bank next year. I have promised to play pinochle with him every day after we get home. I do think he is perfectly wonderful.

Bert read the letter through, then looked at Martha. For a moment neither spoke; then he said, with a grin, —

"Well, can you beat that! Anchored the girl so she'll be near him for the rest of his days! Got one over on Helen for keeps!"

Martha laughed. So that was the way he was taking it! She wondered how he knew about Helen's feelings.

"Some wedding-present, a house and a fat check! I did n't think the old boy had it in him to come across like that!" Then he added, with a chuckle, "Jove, I'd like to see Helen when he tells her!"

"And the partnership!" said Martha. "Poor Ann has worried so because Rodney was poor! She'll be the happiest person in Hilton when she hears of this!"

"Oh, she wanted it to come off, did she? Well, Vieva's a nice little thing!"

And having given this pronouncement, Bert returned to his paper! That was all it meant to him! Martha bit her lip, remembering the happenings of those past months: that was all it meant to him! All it mattered! Oh, Adam! The same old Adam! The same to-day and yesterday, the same to-morrow as in all the ages past! She laughed to herself, tenderly enough, but a little ruefully, too, as she recalled an earlier thought of hers: what — what would befall Eve, as a new Eve, since Adam was, and was going to persist in remaining, just the same old Adam?

Man and woman, Adam and Eve, had come a long way from old Eden! It was a funny world, anyway, the world of to-day, complicated, rushing, with its new interests, its work outside the home for others, and all the old work still to be done as in times gone by — and husband, and children — she thought of Cecily, surely one of her complications! Oh, yes, life to-day was fuller, larger, different! Different! Man might be the same, but woman — surely

woman was different, too, in herself, the very vital self of herself. Yes, she might still have to fall back upon some of the methods of her grandmothers in the managing of that ever-conventional being, man; in the midst of all the new things she was continually and increasingly being called upon to attend to, woman would always have to attend to man! But was n't it a part of woman's being different from the old Eve — in some things, anyway! — that she was already trying to develop a new sort of Eden — not a garden walled in by fears and prejudices, but a broad, open country where man and woman walked side by side and hand in hand in that new morrow which was already dawning?

Ah, that was it! Hand in hand! Not taking diverse paths, not leading or being led, not one preceding the other, but side by side, hand in hand. Not yet, not fully yet, perhaps, — but surely, surely, on to-morrow morning . . .

Bert was still entrenched behind his paper, but she looked at him with a warm stirring at the heart, and loved him, and smiled at him fondly and tenderly. Life forever renewed itself,

when there was love, and trust, and dear companionship! The world to-day might be a new Eden — an Eden full of difficulties and complications; but Martha, thinking of Rodney and Vieva, thinking of Bert and herself, thinking of all who went hand in hand and side by side, smiled again as she told herself that there was, after all, a good deal of the sweetness of old Eden in it!

Bert threw aside his paper and sat up.

"By Jove," he said, "I have n't brought my razor-strap! I forgot it!"

"Your razor-strap is in the side pocket of your bag, my dear," said his Martha calmly.

He looked at her for a moment; then he sat forward and took one of her hands in his. There was a plain gold ring upon it, and Robert looked at that before he looked up into her face. Then he said, devoutly, wonderingly, and quite as though it had never occurred to him before, —

"I say, Pats!! You know you *are* a wonder!"

THE END

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